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This project addresses the consequences of the binary between the affective and cognitive realms in the composition classroom. In the university, reason has been historically valued over emotion in the production of knowledge despite evidence that emotion is both culturally and cognitively constituted. Although recent scholarship in the field of composition has begun to articulate the necessity of studying affect, these theories have not yet revolutionized teaching practices. This work argues that ignoring emotions in the classroom limits opportunities to deepen writing and critical thinking, especially when focusing on emotionally weighty discussions that may involve race, sex, and gender, and so-called “outlaw emotions,” emotions that draw attention to the emoting vs. the oppression itself. Using the theories of Susanne K. Langer, Ann Berthoff, and Lynn Worsham, this project examines the administrative, political, and pedagogical factors of emotion, keeping in mind that emotion may be present, but silent and unseen. By analyzing classroom narratives and interviewing teaching assistants and beginning instructors from a variety of English specializations – composition, literature, and creative writing – the author proposes a rhetoric of emotion that allows emotion to become a larger part of the critical engagement of ideas that writing classes hope to foster. Ultimately, the aim of this text is to articulate the function of emotion in composition, so it is no longer ineffable, or as Worsham calls it, “beyond our semantic availability.”

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT EMOTION: THE RHETORIC  
OF EMOTION IN COMPOSITION

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

To my parents: B.J. Vogel, who introduced me to the delight of literature and Barry  
Vogel, who taught me to never, never, never give up.

## APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Yes, it is a matter of transcending the given, of entering a field of possibles.”

Maxine Greene

In the final scene of Raymond Carver’s “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,” the four couples who have just revealed awful truths about themselves, secrets that could lead to the destruction of their love relationships, sit in silence as the sky darkens and the gin goes down. All that is left is a state of tension, a pause in these previously unexamined lives because for just a moment they have looked inside themselves, and they don’t know what to do next. In this story we get a sense of the hopelessness of the situation because in spite of this moment, these characters do not have the strength or the skills to change. As Mel, the cardiologist, explains, “it ought to make us feel ashamed when we talk like we know what we’re talking about when we talk about love” (146). Ironically, this statement comes from a character who talks the most about love and knows the least. At the end of the story, the glasses of gin consumed highlight the haziness that envelops the emotional weight that the characters can feel, but do nothing about. Nick, the narrator says, “I could hear my human heart beating. I could hear everyone’s heart. I could hear the human noise we sat there making, not one of us

moving, even when the room went dark” (154). Emotion is often like that. It is the elephant in the room, very much a presence, but an elusive one.

Powerful and pervasive, emotions matter in every aspect of our lives, but especially in a composition classroom. However, emotion is a concept that is difficult to capture and understand. Society’s solution to this problem has been to relegate emotion to the personal realm, thereby dismissing its academic value. And yet, although emotion can often be a personal experience, how we assign emotions and perceive them is culturally constituted. Granted, emotions have a physiological basis, but how we make meaning of these experiences is shaped by societal norms. Though we often think of emotion as a purely individual matter, Alison Jaggar writes that “there are complex linguistic and other social preconditions for the existence of human emotions...[that] reflect prevailing forms of social life” (151). Jaggar provides the example of the feeling of betrayal caused by infidelity. We wouldn’t have the emotion without culturally assigning meaning to the event. Language, culture, education, and all social entities, create and shape what we conceive of as “emotion.”

Hillary Clinton’s public crying during the 2008 primaries demonstrates how complicated reactions to emotion are. The image of the normally stoic senator tearing up while being interviewed at a Portsmouth, New Hampshire coffee shop was played in the news over and over again. The discourse over this expression of emotion lasted for a long time and the public’s reactions varied. One Obama supporter wondered out loud, “‘If she is breaking down now, before winning her party’s nomination, then how would she act under pressure as president?’” (Kantor). Then there was Katha Pollitt of the Nation who



wrote that the uproar over Clinton's emotional expression is "the oldest, dumbest canard about women: they're too emotional to hold power" (Pollitt). These polarized reactions were are not surprising, given American culture's conflicting views about emotion. And yet, what made that moment particularly fascinating was that Clinton had been criticized earlier for her emotionless performance and for she was trying to be "male." Or, as another voter explained, "[As a female] in order to succeed you must come across as tougher than your male opponents'" (Kantor). Certainly this example applies to the double standards attached to women and emotion. They are expected to be associated with emotion, but are demoted from positions of power and authority, in politics or academics, when they do show emotion and are seen as less-than-human when they don't.

However, one of the most notable aspects of this event is that immediately after it Clinton won New Hampshire. Regardless of the discussion circling around her display of emotion, some argued that that this expression of emotion ended up being the ideal rhetorical move for Clinton at that time. It was as if the public had been waiting for some sign that she was more than just a political automaton. Certainly, this example illustrates the way beliefs and thoughts about emotions are deeply engrained in us, and how essential they are to politics and public perception. Furthermore, despite the understanding that emotions may be cultural, antiquated ideas about them take precedence. One can say that that emotion is not gendered, but the public's reaction to observing a woman emoting tends to be perceived differently than a man having the same type of reaction.

If American culture had been savvy to the complexities involved in the rhetoric of emotion, perhaps the public wouldn't have been so surprised by its impact. In our tendency to polarize emotion from reason and associate it with chaos and powerlessness, our culture has overlooked the way emotion is essential to our ways of thinking and knowing. Aristotle said that emotion is connected to ethics and judgment, and is evaluated in political arenas. Emotion has significance. As he wrote, "...anyone can get angry – that is easy...but to do all this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, for the right reason, and in the right way is no longer something easy that anyone can do. It is for this reason that good conduct is rare, praiseworthy, and noble" ("Nicomachean" 1109a27-29).

Society has heaped on several assumptions for emotions: that they are personal, gendered, and not as important to knowledge as logic and reason. This denial of emotion's impact on learning and writing has created a gap between what students and teachers experience in the academy and how we talk about our experience. In composition, a field that promotes the idea that words matter, that words make reality, create change, and affect the way we think and perceive the world, our inability to discuss the emotional component of the classroom is a problem. In "A Feeling for Aristotle," Ellen Quandahl describes the absence of a discussion about emotion in composition. She writes, "One is struck by the thundering silence...on the place of pathos, or a theory of pathos in writing instruction" (20). Therefore, despite our field's acknowledgement that words shape reality, we have failed to connect words to the theory of emotion.

What are we talking about when we talk about emotion? One of the difficulties about discussing emotion is that the word is difficult to define. There are two major problems with emotion as defined by Alison Jaggar in “Love and Knowledge.” These are: 1) “the variety, complexity, and even inconsistency of the ways in which emotions are viewed” and 2) “the wide range of phenomena covered by the term ‘emotion’” (147). Since the definition of the term emotion seems fluid, creating language to discuss it is problematic. Lynn Worsham defines emotion as:

the braid of affect and judgment socially and historically constructed and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual, in complex and contradictory ways, to the social order and its structure of meaning. (“Going” 232)

Emotion is defined in many ways across varied disciplines, but throughout this dissertation, I would like the reader to keep Worsham’s definition in mind, as it is one of the most helpful ones for understanding the role of emotion in the composition classroom. At the same time, it may be unreasonable to think that scholars can create an accurate definition first and then simply apply it. Perhaps the best definition needs to be created after the discussion around the topic of emotion has pervaded discourse throughout the field.

While the lack of a widespread accepted definition contributes to the problem with understanding emotion itself, we need to begin to try to discuss this issue in any way that we can. Is it possible to use a definition without marrying the field to that definition and also keeping in mind that that definition may change and grow and develop? For

example, during my interviews with instructors, the instructor often discovered that the process of discussing emotion muddled his/her definition *of* emotion. As one instructor/creative writer put it, after a long discussion about emotion, “I’m starting to think I don’t know what emotion is.” In a certain way, this realization was an exciting one for both of us because it was an excellent place to start inquiry about emotion. It indicated a stance of openness towards discovery and looking at emotion creatively.

Furthermore, the alternative is to continue to keep emotion cloaked in silence or misunderstood. In “Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion,” Worsham describes the dangers of being unable to name emotion. She writes:

Pedagogy binds each individual to the social world through a complex and often contradictory affective life that remains, for the most part, just beyond the horizon of semantic availability, and its success depends upon a mystification of misrecognition of this primary work. In particular, pedagogy provides and limits a vocabulary of emotion and, especially to those in subordinate positions, it teaches an inability to adequately apprehend, name, and interpret their affective lives.  
(240)

Pedagogy itself becomes a training ground for the silencing of emotion. Therefore, according to Worsham, writing classes are constantly sabotaging the work of the field of composition. If writing and education are supposed to be liberatory practices, as Paulo Freire suggests, then to keep the emotional aspects of the classroom unnamed is a step in the wrong direction. More than just a step, we (teachers) are unknowingly acting as forces for the dominant social world, imprinting the needs of the dominant culture on the

minds of students. We have become soldiers of the dominant army, instead of fighters for the revolution of liberation.

If we are to rely on American culture for an understanding of our emotions in the classroom, we are in trouble. In a country that worships the culture of cool, the most acceptable method of dealing with emotions is repression. Historically, Victorianism influenced the notion that passion “was suspect unless it was sexual” (Stearns 4). And this idea still lives on today. As contemporary writer May Sarton explains, “One of the themes in all I have written is the fear of feeling” (qtd. in Plimpton 89). She continues to echo Victorianism’s continued influence by giving the example of no one batting an eye at a seventy-year-old woman who exclaims that she has many lovers, but the disapproval from the same people if she told them that she had fallen deeply in love at the age of seventy (89). Sarton’s comment reveals the relegation of emotion to the sexual realm, and the discomfort with emotion in general. Furthermore, this example shows that there are definite cultural rules for emotions in our culture. I do not think that this quotation suggests a level of comfort with the discussion of emotion and sexuality. Far from it. However, those in American culture often hear about the narrative of promiscuity. We are familiar with this particular story about sexuality. The event about love in old age that Sarton imagines is an illustration of genuine, deep emotion, the kind of emotion that is often avoided. I suspect that genuine or unguarded emotion is the type of emotion that Sarton is pinpointing as surrounded by fear. Peter Stearns calls cultural rules about emotion, “‘feeling rules,’ the recommended norms by which people are supposed to shape their emotional expressions and react to the expressions of others” (2). Certain

“feeling rules” are already established in our university classrooms. The problem is that we assume these rules are correct, and so far, we have not done enough to understand them, to theorize them, and to challenge them.

Ignoring the emotional aspect of the classroom is a mistake for any subject and any type of learning; however, it seems especially ironic that the subject of composition, for the most part, abides by these feeling rules. Although most writing teachers have had experience with the emotional component of writing, they have been trained and taught to think of emotion as amorphous and indefinable. Emotions have been considered many things. Indefinable is just one of the characteristics of emotion that has been embedded in our culture and our classroom culture. Some of the others include: chaotic, dangerous, connected to the body, associated with women and minorities, antithetical to learning and study, unacceptable in specific locations and public environments, private and personal. Not only have these associations been used to define the word “emotion,” but they have kept the meaning of emotion locked in a prison of misinterpretations, misuses, and mislabeling. In a field that espouses the power of language, composition has done little to burst open the labeling that has been used to describe emotion historically. Only recently has composition begun to edge into theories of emotion, even though no one can deny that our field is already emotionally laden and loaded. Although there exists a vast amount of texts on emotion in the fields of philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, and women’s studies, contemporary texts on composition have skirted around the issue of emotion and its role with writing. Perhaps the field that is known as “The Bastard of English Studies” has wanted to stay away from all the lack of status that the category of

emotion implies. Or maybe emotion is so obviously a part of composition that leaders in the field wanted to stress the more “academic” or explicit aspects of composition classes. Regardless, composition theorists are just beginning to articulate and highlight the importance of emotion and learning for teaching and writing.

In her groundbreaking article, “Going Postal,” Worsham states a major problem when it comes to studying emotion, writing that “emotion [is] beyond our semantic availability” (240). Teachers are not used to talking about it, nor do we have a vocabulary that we know and that is available. Thus, emotion as a viable subject matter for study fades off into a netherworld and/or is denied existence. In a certain way, Worsham has pinpointed a problem without offering a solution. Perhaps our job at this time is not to create a new vocabulary, but first to examine and critique the one that we already have. As Jenny Edbauer writes in her recent article, “(Meta) Physical Graffiti: ‘Getting Up’ as Affective Writing Model,” “Our common vocabularies for talking about *what writing does* implicitly involve the affective dimensions....The challenge is how to allow for these implicit dimensions to become a more active part of our writing models” (134). Affect, feeling, emotion – whatever its label – already exists in the writing classroom, and our mistake has been to let it remain in the language and beliefs that we already have instead of examining and probing *what* we already say and think. It is fair to say that “...the world does not only function in explicit ways” (Edbauer 153). However, the only way to change the world, and in this case, the field of composition, is to reexamine emotion in the writing classroom so that instructors can decide if their thinking about it is

helpful for what we are trying to accomplish, or just a rehashing of antiquated ideas and interpretations.

In this dissertation, I examine our beliefs and thinking about emotion in the writing classroom, and analyze the way we talk about these beliefs. I argue that emotion is an essential aspect of teaching composition and knowing how to write. Instructors need to re-evaluate the way we understand the role of emotion in the classroom. Pretending that emotion doesn't exist perpetuates dominant structures and values in the classroom and the limits the teaching of writing. Emotion should be valued throughout the writing process, from our nascent ideas through revision. We need to tap into the learning potential of emotion, acknowledging that by turning away from it, we may be turning away from one of the most important aspects of learning and writing.

This dissertation is separated into four major sections, starting with theory and continuing onward to how our beliefs about emotion affect the departmental split of creative writing and composition; how emotions come into play during class discussion; and how instructors view emotion and then translate these views into their approaches to teaching writing.

Chapter Two explores how we've gotten to the place of valuing reason over emotion in the composition classroom. It discusses how the expressivist movement attempted to provide a solution to this split. Although classical rhetoricians provided space in their theories for emotion, our culture has interpreted them to the point where they fall into dualistic camps of emotion versus reason. Several contemporary fields of study have accepted the cognitive element of emotions, and thus, the importance of



them, but composition has yet to incorporate these ideas into the classroom. In this chapter, I discuss how Ann Berthoff, Susanne Langer, and Lynn Worsham offer theories that can be helpful towards re-evaluating the way instructors conceptualize emotion in composition.

Susanne Langer describes writing as the “objectification of feeling” (“Mind” 87). In her works, she explores the idea that creative language (art symbols) function as a way to project feeling to audience. Whether or not a teacher defines a student’s work as “art,” it is certainly a creation for that student, a real artistic endeavor. Fortunately, creative writers have discussed the impact of emotions on their writing, and we can use what they’ve said to teach our students about this topic.

Chapter Three focuses on the fact that creative writing has been “resigned to affective domain” (Berthoff 64), while other genres or critical writing is considered to be without emotion. Those that have “crossed the lines” or have attempted to examine the split between creative and critical writing have not been supported by the structure of English departments. The way English departments are structured to separate creative writing from another kind of writing, especially composition, echoes the dualism of emotion versus reason. Compositionist Wendy Bishop, who entered the field with a creative writing background, but ultimately became the chair of CCCC, spent much of her work claiming that “actual writers—student writers—don’t fall neatly into categories” (186). That is, the writing process itself is not so different between critical and creative writers and these categories exist now more than ever to “keep ourselves and our academic territories well and safely sorted” (192). Although even creative

writers avoid the topic of emotion in efforts to gain status in the academy, these same writers understand that creative writing, such as poetry, “express[es] certain feelings of the poet and...excite[s] similar feelings in us” (Langer 84). Writing produced in composition does not get this same sentiment.

Considering the political ramifications of emotion in the classroom, we need to investigate further the way that it is a gendered and political issue. As Catherine Lutz writes, “One important aspect [of emotion] is its association with the female, so that qualities that define the emotional also define women. For this reason, any discourse on emotion is also, at least implicitly, a discourse on gender” (69). Worsham writes in the afterword to *A Way to Move*, “ideology and ideological state apparatuses do their work most effectively through the schooling of emotion” (162). There is a political component to the display of emotion that lies just below the surface of things. Who gets to show emotions and who does not is not politically neutral. The people who get silenced are usually the ones on the margins – people of color, females, etc. Often this silence is a reaction to real pain, and so not an inappropriate reaction. In this way, emotions create a web of influence that is difficult to untangle and analyze. And, as Lutz writes, “emotion, like the female, has typically been viewed as something natural rather than cultural” (69). This “naturalizing” of emotion is dangerous to our ability to manage, use, and acknowledge its power. Our awareness of this reality is essential to stop the ways we unknowingly reinforce dominant ideology.

Chapter Four investigates the ways in which emotion is a factor in classroom discussion, especially when it is expressed during discussions of race, gender, and sexual

identity. Although these subjects challenge dominant streams of thinking and probe at public and private emotions, the expression of emotions is regulated by dominant codes of behavior. Jane Tompkins discusses her experience with this dichotomy in “Me and My Shadow.” She writes, “You have to pretend that epistemology, or whatever you’re writing about, has nothing to do with your life, that it’s more exalted, and more important, because it (supposedly) *transcends* the merely personal” (170). But Tompkins thinks this split does not reflect her actual experiences, and this “public-private *hierarchy*, is a founding condition of female oppression” (170). By categorizing emotions as private and irrelevant, women, and other minority groups are devalued, and more importantly, silenced. Tompkins touches upon one type of silencing in academic environments: when “speaking personally [or emotionally] in a professional context” (170) is dismissed, and thus, not heard or not taken seriously or not published at all.

In particular, this chapter discusses “outlaw emotions,” a phrase coined by Jaggar to describe discussions of feminism and gender. Outlaw emotions are emotions expressed by an oppressed group in response to their oppression. Since these emotions are “outlawed” in an academic environment, attention and disdain fall towards the emotion of the oppression rather than the oppression itself. Furthermore, during these discussions, emotions may be stirred up from the non-oppressed group. Since these emotions are not allowed in our current careful (politically correct) environment, thought and emotion that challenges the ideal progressive narrative are lost and buried underneath the surface. The result is a discussion that hardly reflects the reality of what our students are thinking and feeling.

Finally, Chapter Five investigates the thoughts and beliefs about emotion that instructors of composition hold. This chapter appears at the end of this project because it is a way to demonstrate how beliefs about emotion are put into practice. Theory is extremely useful, but it is also useful to study how emotion is enacted and understood in the classroom. Again, emotion is difficult to understand. Certainly, the instructors in any demographic have been raised in a culture that separates emotion from reason and undervalues the educational benefit of emotion. Despite their own indoctrination into antiquated beliefs about emotion, beginning instructors, especially graduate student teaching assistants, are in the process of studying English and have their own teaching experiences in the composition classroom. Through interviews of Teaching Assistants and beginning instructors at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), I show how emotion is a factor in composition classes and how it is often simultaneously dismissed in their teaching. Since these instructors are in the process of solidifying their own teaching philosophies, along with beginning to understand the expectations of the academic world, they offer an interesting look at what will be the future of our field. Three dominant themes emerge: 1) the understanding the writing teacher has about emotion and the writing process, 2) the teacher's beliefs or understanding about how emotion operates in the way they shape and assess their courses, and 3) their experiences with emotion in the classroom and their reflections on these events.

In many ways, TAs are representatives of the future of the field. Although often dismissed (like emotion itself) because of their lack of status in the university system, TAs offer us a Petri dish in which to see the influences of current trends in pedagogy, as

well as how outdated theories still reign in the classroom. The UNCG TA Program is unique in that the TAs are given both training and support for their composition courses, as well as a certain amount of autonomy. TAs are the instructors of their own classes (not just assistants to professors), and after their first semester teaching, can choose their texts and curriculum for their classes. The TAs of the study, six in all, were chosen because of their openness to being interviewed, as well as their continued dedication to reflecting on their own teaching practices. Furthermore, I chose TAs (or beginning instructors) hailing from different specializations – creative writing, literature, and composition to provide a varied view of the topic of emotion.

In the final chapter, the conclusion, I address what difference emotion makes to the composition classroom. One goal of a composition course is to attempt to introduce discourses that may be unsettling. Exploring injustices that are glossed over in life can provoke emotions in a space, an academic place, where an overabundance of emotion is not tolerated. In a certain way we are putting students in a prison of our own making. We dig deep into the oppressions around us, but shy away from the emotional aftermath. What is the result for our students? If emotions are not embraced in the academic classroom and certain topics, voices, and opinions incite emotion, the institutional and cultural mechanism at work inevitably silence those who do not benefit from the status quo. Both student and teacher will tend to sidestep these topics/ideas. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks writes, “The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained” (39). hooks hits

upon one of the biggest nightmares for teachers: a class that has traveled into an emotional direction beyond our control. But this fear of emotion can act as a barrier to learning depth and writing excellence. Teachers are constantly negotiating the emotional temperatures of their classes, but these negotiations are considered to be personal instead of cultural. I believe that the potential for deep learning, passionate writing, and social change is lost in the way we conceive of these emotional spaces.

In the end of Worsham's afterword to *A Way to Move*, she writes, "It will be a shame if the new interest in emotion as a category of critical thought does not move us into a new orbit of social and political possibility" (163). Just because we do not have a language to discuss emotions, doesn't mean that we are unable to create one. I am fully aware that there are many unknowns inherent in what I am proposing, but the field of composition is supposed to be a field where we are allowed to investigate and to dream of possibilities.

And, after all this investigation, what are we supposed to do about it? We need to re-evaluate the way we understand the role of emotion in the classroom. Pretending that emotion doesn't exist perpetuates dominant structures and values in the classroom and the limits the teaching of writing. We need to incorporate the value of emotion throughout the writing process. We need to tap into the "epistemic potential" of emotion that Alison Jaggar discusses in "Love and Knowledge," acknowledging that by turning away from emotion, we may be turning away from the most important aspects of learning. Of course, emotion is difficult to decipher and understand; however, the conclusion explores what instructors can actually do to open up the way being aware of

emotion as a tool for learning can help shape the learning moments that occur in the classroom.

## CHAPTER II

### TOWARDS A BRIEF THEORY OF EMOTION

Even though many have dismissed the importance of emotion in current academic environments, emotion as a component of rhetoric is not a new concept for rhetoricians. Aristotle was aware of the role of emotion in rhetoric. In Book II of *The Rhetoric*, he writes, “the emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgment” (1378a-20-21). Rhetoric, the art of persuasion, can only be accomplished successfully if the orator takes into account the emotions of himself and his audience. Simply, the rhetorical triangle gives pathos equal weight to logos and ethos. In “A Feeling for Aristotle,” Quandahl writes, “Aristotle offers a view of both the emotions and the virtues as profoundly rhetorical” (16). That is, we may experience emotions without language, but we can only make meaning of our emotions through language. Therefore, emotion is intertwined with is intertwined with all language. She writes, “Our access to emotion, finally, is in language” (21). Emotion is key in all areas of the rhetorical triangle – speaker, audience, and subject. Certainly, Aristotle thought that emotion was and is an essential ingredient to thinking. Although he emphasized the fact that emotion was separate from reason, many of his comments about rhetoric imply a connection between judgment (reason) and emotion. In particular, he connected emotion, experiencing pleasure and pain, to the idea of virtue writing, “some people define the virtues as states of freedom from emotion and of quietude. However, they make the mistake of using



these terms absolutely and without adding such qualifications as ‘in the right manner, ‘at the right or wrong time,’ and so forth” (“*Nichomachean*”1104b3-27). Therefore, Aristotle implies judgment of the ethical value of a person’s actions with emotion. He goes on by stating, “anyone can get angry—that is easy...but to do all this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, for the right reason, and in the right way is no longer something easy that anyone can do” (1109a27-29). According to Aristotle, virtue is something that a person can think about *and* is connected to emotion and emotional expression.

Although Plato conveyed a view of emotion that coincides with a split between reason and emotion, he still has a reverence for emotion. For Plato, emotion is associated with poetry, and reason and is something separate and full of “divine power.” In *Meno*, he writes, “For a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is not longer in him” (534b3-5). Clearly, he would not agree with the assertion that emotions are culturally constructed and part of rational thought, but Plato did understand the importance of the imagination and the not-yet-known. As writer J.J. Chambliss puts it, “What Socrates suggests is the necessity of trying to know what is unknown” and the “possibility of knowledge” (7). This message is important for contemporary composition courses. It provides a space for both instructors and students to acknowledge that writing is an act that includes emotion and not-knowing. Chambliss writes, “the place of the ‘contingent, uncertain, and incomplete’ [noted also by Dewey] so well portrayed by tragic poets, remains as part of the context from which philosophers cannot escape, however much

their rational contradictions strive to regulate this context” (13). This idea of uncertainty, chaos, the unknown, and the imagination, resides within the space that is often resigned to emotion. Of course, both Plato and Aristotle inform Descartes and his notion of the mind/body split that still pervades our ideas of knowledge today. “Je pense, donc je suis. I think, therefore I am.”

Our mistake with these philosophers (Aristotle, Plato) is that we’ve erased their nuances, simplified what they had to say. Even though they perceived of the mind (reason) as separate from the body (emotion), (ideas that many argue against today), they did not discount emotion. Furthermore, Aristotle understood the inherent importance of emotion as an element of rhetoric and although Plato conceived of emotion and the imagination as out of the grasp of reason, he still had a deep respect for the imagination and creativity. Somehow scholars have taken these ideas and cut off their value to the field of composition. What I’d like us to take away from the classical rhetoricians is that emotion is important to rhetoric and that imagination is something to be revered.

One mistake often made when evaluating the theoretical value of composition practices is that people tend to align their philosophies on one side of any spectrum. This tendency has been examined throughout feminist texts for awhile now. Helene Cixous, especially, stressed the problem with binaries in our language use, yet she writes about the importance of writing for changing the world. She says, “writing is the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (“Laugh” 883). Furthermore, “the hierarchizing exchange” that she describes between phallogentric

language mirrors the kind of hierarchizing one can observe in the binary between emotion and reason. As a result, antiquated male ideas that winning involves total domination continue to pervade our culture. This tendency hinders our ability to create and to come up with innovative ideas about the way our culture operates. However, I am particularly intrigued by her statement about writing and feeling. She says, “we no longer even know how to let ourselves feel, how to allow ourselves to feel what we feel” (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 12). In this way, the subject of emotion and writing is very much connected to feminist theories. Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie are just two compositionists who explain that feminist theories, and Cixous in particular, inform composition research and “can become a location for reconsidering what counts as knowledge and for revitalizing research in composition” (8).

I do not want to fall into the category of making emotion the reigning aspect of composition classes. This would be an over-adjustment to the dismissive attitude that we have towards emotion. Instead, my hope is that we begin to perceive emotion as an integral part of learning, thinking, and writing and that we count emotion towards how we make meaning in our classes.

### *Emotion in Composition*

Many would argue that the role of emotion in composition inherently connects to the rise and fall of the expressivist movement and the field’s struggle to embrace emotion, but also to obtain legitimacy as a field of study. On the one hand, we try to incorporate the role of emotion and learning in our classes. On the other hand, we are

trying to cultivate authority in a system that disdains emotion and denies the reality that thinking is interlaced with emotion. We can examine the backlash against the expressivist movement, looking at the anger and the hostile dismissal of a writing movement that has its roots in the long-established literary movement of Romanticism and observing the rejection of expressivist principles.

Although it seems like a popular trend to dismiss the expressivists, we have yet to learn all that we need to learn from the expressivist theorists. One of the ways that the field has lost out is by depicting expressivism as antithetical to academic discourse. David Bartholomae writes, “it is wrong to teach late adolescents that writing is an expression of individual thoughts and feelings. It makes them suckers and, I think, it makes them powerless, at least to the degree that it makes them blind to tradition, power, and authority as they are present in language and culture” (128-129). It *is* wrong to teach that writing is *only* an expression of individual thoughts and feelings, but that sounds like a particular and flawed interpretation of expressivism. I’m not sure how students are supposed to begin and continue a writing project *without* paying attention to their individual thoughts and feelings. Bartholomae is implying that most students enter composition class with confidence in their authorial voices, when most do not. In fact, writers’ emotions about their identities as writers are factors that affect the writing process.

This argument over expressivism is similar and connected to arguments about the inclusion of emotion in composition. I can imagine a cry from opponents that I’m dumbing down the field. However, the argument itself is harmful to our students because

experience teaches us that to become a good writer we need to become familiar with all sides of writing. In a certain way, the reason why the undercurrent of emotion in a composition class can overtake a class is because it is under the surface or if it is brought out into the open it just hangs in the air, not reflected upon, or analyzed, or paused over.

As Sherrie Gradin writes in *Romancing Rhetorics*, expressivism is concerned with the student from a holistic perspective. As a theory and practice, it works against the idea that the student writing is divorced from the student's lived experience. She says, "Writing is not an action that takes place severed from the complex interaction and dynamics taking place within the student as a whole, nor is it severed from the cultural milieu and historical moment" (xvii). Although social-epistemic theorists argue that expressivism focuses too much on the individual and the idea of a writer writing alone regardless of the social issues around him/her, Gradin states that "Self-expression takes place within a social context and self-expression also is language as action. This action may be focused towards the transformation of the individual, but such a transformation also leads to societal transformation" (111). Part of the problem with the current conception of expressivism is the concretizing of concepts that are more active than static, more fluid than frozen. The expressivists never said to ignore audience and to only focus on the individual. Gradin cites Peter Elbow's "An Argument for Ignoring Audience:" "It is not that writers should never think about their audience. It's a question of when" (qtd. in Gradin 51). It is a misinterpretation of expressivism to say that expressivists believe that students should hand in a pile of freewriting pages under the guise that they were shaped for an audience.

Many claim that expressivism is a throwback to self-obsessed writers and artists, and that it ignores the importance of public, social expression, it is more likely that it offers us a way to understand self and culture. In “Is Expressivism Dead?” the authors examine the value of expressivism through Peter Elbow and German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder arguing that expressivism is not a theory encouraging isolation, but a way to “identify with one another and, thereby, [find] new grounds for social communion” (Fishman 654), that the purpose for understanding personal experience is to hear and understand one another. “Herder believes the artistic process is not just an expression of something already known, but also a groping toward destinations and forms that are not understood until artists arrive at them” (650). Thus, through creating something new there is a necessity to bridge the old with the new, to connect what one already understands to what one can learn from others. The essence of creativity must be connecting the personal to the shared experience in some way. Art is not very interesting if it just excites the artist. One makes art and enjoys art to connect one’s own experiences with those of other humans.

In their article, McCarthy and Fishman retell what goes through Fishman’s mind every time he stands before a new introduction to philosophy course:

And I feel like I’m being pulled in two directions, my professors from graduate school whispering in one ear, ‘Initiate ‘em into philosophy with a capital P, with close critical analysis of canonic texts.’ In my other ear is sounding my own conviction based on twenty-five years of teaching: students don’t learn very well unless they have an emotional connection. If they cannot relate their own lives to philosophy, their familiar languages to the new one, the papers they write will be no more than products of a mind game. They won’t be their own, and they won’t help them live their lives. (654)

His thoughts exemplify how the split is enacted in a real teaching situation, and how he has to struggle with the pull of certain academic training and expectations that don't necessarily encompass the practices of teaching and learning. The expectation to dump students into the world of rational versus emotional is already internalized by this professor. Obviously, if he has to struggle with this issue, even if years of experience have taught him that students need to connect to what they are learning, there is unseen, but felt pressure from the academic community that an emotional stake in the subject matter is irrelevant.

Yet despite years of expressivist influence, Robert Yagelski's 2006 article in *College English*, describes a recent meeting of National Writing Project teachers where many attendees considered Elbow and Donald Murray's theories considered "radical" (532). Anti-expressivists have made their mark so clearly that expressivism is dismissed in current academic circles, despite the fact that Elbow's freewriting has become second nature in composition while several of his other ideas have been misinterpreted.

At the same time, other fields are beginning to catch on to the importance of emotion. Ironically, English Departments lag behind the trend of philosophers, psychologists, neuroscientists, even in mainstream publications, such as, Antonio Damasio's *Descartes' Error* and Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*. It is especially troubling that composition has mostly ignored these current ideas about thought and emotion. In a field that is emotion laden, where pedagogical practices are infused with ethical claims and theorists defend their views with a passion, the lack of the

theorizing of emotion is antithetical to the field as a whole. As Laura Micciche notes, “we have the commonplace, and therefore overlooked, presence of emotion in the very discourse of composition studies – in the ways we talk about what we do and why we do it. Composition discourse offers a strikingly explicit use of the rhetoric of emotion as a source for ethical claims about teaching practices and working conditions, making the absence of emotion theory especially strange and notable” (“Emotion” 166). Composition is just beginning to articulate why emotion is important to writing, but the field has been slow to incorporate theory into practice.

### *Emotion's Influence*

The idea that academic pursuits are devoid of emotion is of course flawed. In Jaggar's “Love and Knowledge,” she writes about the “myths of dispassionate investigation.” She explains that the “positivist tradition” has perceived emotions as impediments to scientific investigation and that humans need to find a way to carry on inquiry in spite of them. However, if we reflect upon the scientific inquiry in the past, we can see that the choices scientists made and the directions of scientific research were influenced by social values and interests (Jaggar 156). Emotions are a part of social values. This suggests that even in the subject of scientific investigation, supposedly the most rational, logical study of our world, emotions play a role whether or not we acknowledge this reality. Jaggar writes, “we must recognize that our efforts to reinterpret and refine our emotions are necessary to our theoretical investigation...not a self-indulgent substitute for political analysis and political action [but] ...itself a kind of



political theory and political practice” (164). Therefore, our ideas about emotions are saturated with political meaning.

Despite the fact that emotions are a powerful force in the classroom, instructors spend a great deal of time trying to avoid them. As undergraduates, students often reach a time in their lives when they are re-evaluating ideas and beliefs because of new contexts, new influences. This is especially true in most composition classes where texts explore both public and private human issues. However, although composition instructors may challenge ideas students have had for many years, the emotional impact of this struggle or tension is rarely discussed as part of critical thinking. Instead, any emotions associated with deep critical thinking are often pushed aside and avoided or only attributed to the individual student-teacher relationship or circumstance.

Although discomfort should be an accepted part of a composition classroom, most instructors and students want to avoid discomfort at all costs. In *Feeling Power*, Megan Boler writes, “educators are supposed to challenge ideas and this may lead to discomfort” (193). She continues, “While an educator may see herself as simply urging critical inquiry, the other [the students] may feel this call as profoundly threatening to their very survival” (194). In this sense, we are underestimating the emotional impact of pushing students to expand their engrained beliefs. Rarely do we even acknowledge that our critical inquiry may be emotionally difficult. Do we ever remind our students that they may become upset by our discussions? Students (and teachers) who encounter new ideas must manage their emotions on their own in an environment that denies the emotional component of what they are learning. For students, this may include a reaction of shutting

down their thinking. Of course, the teacher is not absent from this issue. We are also not trained to take into account the role emotion plays in thought as evaluator of students and evaluators of ourselves.

Boler explains that the disruption of blindly accepted beliefs (one of our possible goals of composition) may threaten self-identities. She writes, “National identities rest upon complex fictions and investments; students’ identities are invested as well in the dominant paradigm. Students and educators may feel a sense of threat to our precarious identities as we learn to bear witness” (195). Boler pleads with us as educators to take the time and effort to study emotion in the classroom and create a new way of dealing with it. “In order to name, imagine and materialize a better world, we need an account of how Western discourses of emotion shape our scholarly work, as well as pedagogical recognition of how emotions shape our classroom interactions” (xv). Thus, she reiterates that our language about emotion matters and that it has a major influence over educators research and teaching practices.

Yet fear is often the emotion that stands in the way of acknowledging the importance of emotion. In *Teaching to Transgress* hooks writes, “The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained.... Many professors have conveyed [to hooks] their feeling that the classroom should be a ‘safe’ place; that usually translates to mean that the professor lectures to a group of quiet students who respond only when they are called on...many students, especially students of color, may not feel at all ‘safe’ in what appears to be a

neutral setting” (39). Is the classroom ever a neutral setting, and how do we define “safe place”? hooks exposes our ingrained conceptions of what a class should look like and shows that they are based on white middle-class values, privileging white men or at least originally conceived by white men. Composition is particularly a zone of conflicting emotional expectations. On the one hand, we want to adhere to university standards of classroom decorum. On the other hand, we introduce topics that are catalysts for intensive emotional responses. Furthermore, there is an expectation from the university that students will learn academic discourse, which is fine, but often this idea doesn’t allow for any personal or emotional engagement in the subject matter. However, this concept of academic thinking without emotion is not only false, but a hindrance to many of our basic teaching goals.

Our culture has moved far away from acknowledging the importance of emotion, especially the value of emotion throughout all aspects of a composition class. Some of the factors that contribute to this include: how we perceive emotion in relation to reason, a lack of discourse on the topic, a struggle for resources in an institutional system that separates reason and emotion and critical and creative, and a belief that education is to teach people to uphold existing societal structures, instead of teaching people how to revise and change society.

Although not overtly apparent, the discounting of emotion is ultimately motivated by the desire for power and how dominant power structures reinforce unequal notions of how we define discourse, education, and knowledge. It is about who in this culture gets to decide what is valued and how resources and rewards (tangible and intangible) will be

distributed. In Boler discusses the social implications of turning away from the impact of emotion in education. She writes, "...the 'risky' business of addressing emotions within our classrooms is a productive and necessary direction for the exploration of social justice and education. The social control of emotions, and emotions as a site of resistance to oppression, are underexplored areas of study in most scholarly disciplines as well as within pedagogical practices" (xv). The prevailing thinking about education is that classrooms are supposed to be "serious" learning spaces where we put emotions aside to focus on subject matter only.

*Perception, Creativity, and the Political*

Several theorists can be of help when investigating the problem of emotion in the composition classroom. In particular, Susanne K. Langer, Ann Berthoff, and Lynn Worsham offer generative ways of thinking about emotion and language use. For Langer, emotion and thought are intricately linked, and the Cartesian duality that our society abides by is merely a philosophical hypothesis and it is treated as a given. She explains that humans have a need for symbolization, and that we come up with symbols through our perceptions and sense data. "All thinking begins with *seeing*; not necessarily through the eye, but with some basic formulations of sense perception" (266). Thus, whatever is perceived through senses, emotion, and feeling are either in the symbols (language) that we have chosen, or in the language that we have now does not necessarily make these parts of thinking communicable. Therefore, just because we are unable to currently communicate what these non-discursive aspects of thought are they are still 1) present

and essential to our thinking and 2) we have not formulated an adequate way of understanding them discursively.

According to Langer, our understanding of language is limited. Whenever we use symbols to make meaning, we are also using “sense-data.” Feeling and emotion are inherent to all language. As Arabella Lyons writes, Langer believes “language’s tempo, rhythm, sound, word association, and the sequence of ideas and images must be balanced to create experience, not simply assertion [of it]” (276). This is especially useful when contemplating what we do in composition. Powerful writing, especially non-fiction writing, is most effective when the author creates an experience for the reader. Talking around a subject rarely creates good writing. However, in order to do this well, writers must call upon their perceptions, perceptions that involve sense-data, emotion, and other aspects of language that we have yet to articulate. If we think of writing in this way, genre distinctions become less important to the actual writing process or act of creation. Thus, categorizing a particular type of writing by its genre may not adequately represent the rhetorical moves a writer makes or the experiences of the writer and the emotions involved in the act of writing.

Fortunately, Langer offers hope for invention. She writes in *Philosophy in a New Key* that our intellectual trajectories of thinking and philosophizing are “determined by the nature of our questions” (4). That is, we can change the way we think about language and composition through asking different questions, coming up with different answers, and altering our embedded schemas for how we perceive the world. Through creativity and discovery we can accomplish this. She writes:

...most new discoveries are suddenly-seen things that were always there. A new idea is a light that illuminates presences which simply had no form for us before the light fell on them. We turn the light here, there, and everywhere, and the limits of thought recede before it. (8)

Acknowledging the importance of emotion to thinking, writing, and all language use is not necessarily new. Yet we need to posit our questions in such a way as to break through what is assumed or naturalized, to shine the light on emotion and see what it can offer us as compositionists, teachers, and writers.

Similarly to Langer, Berthoff writes that “Thinking begins with perception” (64) and perception is linked to the imagination. She writes, “Meanings don’t just happen: we make them; we find and form them. In that sense, all writing courses are creative writing courses” (69). The writing process, according to Berthoff, is about making meaning, not about the separation of genres. Berthoff addresses emotion through her discussion of chaos and the writer’s ability to withstand the chaos of invention in order to generate new ideas and writing. As any writer knows, the beginning of a writing project carries with it many unknowns. Most deep writing can cause discomfort for writers because they do not begin knowing exactly how the writing will turn out. In addition, they must deal with the imperfection of their writing or frustration that it will not be as good as what they imagine their ideal writing to be. The process of writing demands an emotional repertoire that few students have before they enter college. As Berthoff suggests, it is important for writing instructors to understand and address the emotional parts of the writing process from writer to reader.

One important aspect of emotion that is getting increasingly more attention in Composition Studies is its political nature. Worsham and Boler offer ways to look at the underlying political dimensions of emotion, alerting educators to the fact that the way we view emotions is profoundly political and is related to who gets heard and who gets silenced in the academy and the culture at large. Those groups on the margins of dominant culture benefit the least from the way we view emotion in the classroom. Furthermore, Worsham adds another dimension to the discussion of emotion in “Going Postal” by exploring how one’s emotions are learned from the dominant culture and that the classroom is a particularly powerful place where emotions get “schooled.” That is, how people respond to language on an affective level gets taught in many areas of society, but especially through education. Worsham uses the example of “going postal” to discuss how this phrase has morphed from a definition of a horrific act connected to an oppressive work environment to a tongue-in-cheek every day way of describing a person who loses control. Again, the language that one uses can alter one’s emotional response to an event. Now, when one hears the phrase “going postal,” laughter ensues. In this way, the language itself has worked to dull our emotions in the situation. Thus, the effect of beliefs about emotion is already at work in our culture, especially in our classrooms. It is then up to instructors to begin to understand that the emotional content of a classroom is just as significant, or rather, intricately linked with the visible texts and obvious subject matter of the class.

Finally, Micciche, who is writing some of the most current material on emotion, focuses on what emotion does in the classroom. In her book, *Doing Emotion*, Micciche

encourages instructors to think about the function of emotion, whether or not that emotion stems from physiological or cognitive experiences. The argument that emotions are more bodily felt than cognitively conceived is an ongoing discussion. Yet Micciche's perspective is that while those discussions are certainly relevant to the world, for compositionists, they can be distracting to the problem of how to use emotions in the composition classroom. She writes, "I am interested in what emotions perform/embody/enact/generate and in how naming emotions affects our relation to the situation in and for which they are named" (14). How we talk about emotion affects the way emotion operates, and is performed and embodied.



### CHAPTER III

#### CROSSING THE DIVIDE: CREATIVE WRITING, COMPOSITION, AND EMOTION

“All of my writing was born out of anger. In order to contain it, I had to write. If I had not written, I would have exploded.”

Elie Wiesel

“Write to the emotional center of things. Write toward vulnerability...Tell the truth as you understand it.”

Annie Dillard

“All my life I’ve been frightened at the moment I sit down to write.”

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

#### *The Glory of the Workshop*

Throughout my Master’s Degree in creative writing, I sat in workshop after workshop while we dissected the weekly assigned student story. The workshops went like this:

You sit behind an imaginary glass wall, although you hear everything, see everything, and can say nothing. Any voice that you ever had must live inside your work. You must remain silent. You are not allowed to speak, perhaps an occasional noise will

be allowed. In a circle around the room each student takes a turn at commenting on your writing. (Except for you. You just sit there.) They say things like, “This doesn’t work for me” and “I don’t quite feel it.” They call you “author,” presumably to distance you from your words. Even positive comments make you feel just a little bit naked. The workshop could conceivably be collaborative, but not in this creative writing workshop. Classroom politics pervade the room. Your two friends who are sleeping together always love each other’s work. Your nemesis hates everything you write. Everyone waits for what the professor has to say to know if they are going to be the next undiscovered talent. After your writing has been scrutinized and fully laid open, you are allowed to say a few words, presumably to thank the other students for their time that they took away from their own writing to read your work. You are a bit shell shocked, although you will absorb and synthesize the information later. For now you are unable to fully recover, so you say, “Thank you. Thank you very much.” And the truth is that it is a gift for anyone to read your writing, but this critics’ circle, though efficient, has left out any dialogue between the author and the reader.

This workshop is an example of the fiction workshops that I’ve experienced. It is far away from a composition class where (we hope) teachers and students are not just examining the page, but exploring the dialogic nature of invention. As Karen LeFevre discusses in *Invention as a Social Act*, writing (and language) is inherently social (1). Many ideas, experiences, and people lead up to a piece of writing and many of these ideas will follow it. Perhaps the workshop method is better than thinking that a writer

creates completely from the same notion as Plato's "recollecting."<sup>1</sup> It is, in Margaret Atwood's words, an improvement on the idea of "the writer as a kind of spider, spinning out his entire work from within" (qtd. in LeFevre 27). There *is* a social element to it. And yet, it seems as if composition classes have utilized the social and collaborative nature of writing in a different way. Certainly, the field of composition has learned much about writing since the first CCCC in 1949, over fifty years ago.

As creative writing classes and composition classes grow in number in universities, the communication gap between the two disciplines widens. The workshop method described only illustrates one aspect of creative writing classes. It is not meant to disparage degrees in creative writing, but rather to think about the ways writing is perceived differently in traditional creative writing classes versus current composition courses. Whether in class or out, creative writers have a history of approaching and talking about writing in different ways than compositionists. Since this dissertation focuses on the role of emotion in writing classes, I would like to examine the way creative writing is often associated with emotion. Creative writers use language about writing that takes into account the role that emotion, imagination, and intuition play in the writing process differently than, let's say, non-creative writers or other academic scholars in English. My purpose for this chapter is not to further separate creative writers from

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<sup>1</sup> When I mention Plato's "recollecting," I am referring to the winged horse and charioteer in *Phaedrus*, and how according to Plato, true knowledge comes from a memory of the soul, not something systematically created (118-119). According to LeFevre, the interpretation of Plato that continues to shape American culture discounts the social nature of writing, invention, and language use (1).

other types of writers, but to see how creative writers talk about writing and emotion and what *all* kinds of writers can learn from this.

While in my fiction writing program, I learned about the field of composition when I volunteered to work in the writing center at the Center for Worker Education, a small college connected to City College of New York with a student body of returning adult students. In my role of writing tutor, I was given the chance to think about the role of the beginning writer and his/her challenges with bringing an idea from initial hazy thought to a full fledged piece of writing. This experience, along with my conversations with the director of the writing center, a Rhetoric and Composition professor, influenced me to think about writing from other angles and perspectives beyond the finished product. Of course, I had tried to study my own process while writing stories, but creative writers tend to perpetuate the idea of writing as a magical occurrence, so there were not many in my program who wanted to talk about how they put their stories down on paper. In private though, I had an addiction to books on writing. From Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* to Brenda Ueland's *If You Want to Write*, I had begun a collection of mainstream writing authors who could help me along in my writing process.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, my creative writing professors did not seem to care about who I read why I wrote what I wrote. In fact, there was almost hostility towards those writers who wanted to talk about any words or ideas that did not end up on the page. They had no patience for what we think and talk about in the composing process. However, though the

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to texts stated, see Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*; Natalie Goldberg, *Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life*; Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*; Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*; Sophy Burnham, *For Writers Only*; Rebecca Rule and Susan Wheeler, *Creating the Story: Guides for Writers*.

field of creative writing lacks in terms of acknowledging process, its students and teachers seem to successfully honor other aspects of writing. Although Robert Frost was a poet who espoused the importance of technique, he also wrote, “No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader” (17). His words echo the sentiment that emotion is connected to the writing process and the writing and continues to be translated to the reader. In a sense he is also implying that good writing contains an emotional element. Although he was speaking about poetry (known to be one of the most emotionally-laden genres), I believe that this idea works for other genres as well. One of the reasons why we appreciate any type of writing is because the writing communicates some type of passion or emotion, even if it is a student’s anger towards the betrayal of his/her best friend.

There is much to be learned from creative writers and what they say, especially on the subject of emotion. The difference between creative and critical writing (in practice) is not as wide as we think and certainly not as dissimilar as the structure of English departments would have us believe. For this chapter on the split between creative writing and composition and how emotion factors into it, I focus on three major areas: 1) the institutional structures that keep the two subjects apart and push one (creative) over to the “affective domain;” 2) the writer’s emotion when dealing with chaos during the writing process and how creative writers have commented on this aspect of the writing process; and 3) an examination of how creative writers talk about emotion, especially the metaphors they use to avoid talking about emotion.

*The Wedge Between Creative Writing, Composition, and Emotion*

The divide between creative writing classes and composition classes may not be a reflection of how writers actually write. Theorists, including Berthoff in the *Making of Meaning*, suggest that the way a writer perceives the world and makes meaning from it is far more important to the process of writing than our socially constructed genres and divisions. She writes that, “The emphasis on differentiating creative and critical writing, as if they were symptoms of different brain functions, has meant that we’ve lost advantages that there are to be enjoyed if we concentrate instead on what they have in common” (28). One of these advantages includes the way we conceive of the composing process. By splitting the writing processes of creative and critical, personal and academic, and labeling them as such, we create a divide that may not be as wide as we think. We (writers and students) lose something from this labeling. Berthoff writes, “When something called ‘personal writing’ is differentiated from something called ‘expository writing,’ do we really know what we’re differentiating?” (26). The field of English Studies separates different types of writing, but this might have nothing to do with the actual writing processes, but more to do with convenience, politics, or money. “Separating some kinds of writing and calling them ‘structured’ leaves other kinds to be pushed into the creativity corner” (27). Do these categories that we’ve created really serve us as writing teachers or as writers? Do they serve our universities and students? These categories, just like the categories of emotion versus reason, need to be constantly re-evaluated to determine whether or not they serve our students in learning the writing process. As Berthoff writes, “It is not because they are two-valued that dichotomies are

dangerous; it is because the categories they establish can so easily be confused with reality” (“Killer” 13). So if it is helpful to label creative writing as different than composition, that is fine; however, to label it as such and then identify creative writing with emotion and all creativity is to deny its existence in what we write in composition. Again, the problem is not the categorization itself, but the assumptions that prevent thinking, learning, and examining.

One other disadvantage of these categorizations is that we separate different types of writing and the result can be a misunderstanding of how emotion and thought are a part of the writing process for all writing genres. Berthoff comments on how these splits shape the composition class. She writes, “Reclaiming the imagination is necessary because the positivists have consigned it to something called ‘the affective domain,’ in contradiction to ‘the cognitive domain’... You can see the false dichotomy at work here” (“Making” 64). Composition falls on the cognitive side while creative writing is considered to be on the affective/imaginative side. But it is not accurate to associate the imagination with only emotion. Both emotion and thought (although in a more intertwined way) are involved in the act of creation. Both “creative writing” and composition are subjects that are mediated through language and there are categorizations we’ve set up to distinguish them do not accurately reflect them.

Bishop argues that our need to categorize stems from our need to perpetuate the systems of English Departments. She says, “We need to be crossing the line between composition and creative writing far more often than we do. In fact, we may want to eliminate the line entirely” (181). Bishop’s academic path from poet to composition

theorist prompted her to examine distinctions between how we teach creative writing and composition. Through her experience she discovered, “it was more productive to cross the line than to create a separate teaching persona on either side” (183). Bishop’s statement calls attention to the way teacher identity shapes our English classes. The fact that Bishop felt the need to choose one teaching persona over another demonstrates how different we perceive classes to be and the institutional pressure to conform to these notions. While teachers are fully entrenched in their identities as “composition” or “creative writing” professors, Bishop writes, “actual writers – student writers – don’t fall neatly into categories” (186). If the writing of each category is more similar than dissimilar, then we have to reevaluate how we view them, and for the purposes of this dissertation, we have to re-evaluate how creative writers value emotion over those in composition.

Furthermore, Bishop discusses the misconceptions about creative writing and composition that students have. Often students believe that composition is imposed with rules of the academy, while creative writing has no rules at all. It’s not uncommon for beginning students to claim that if the writing is creative than it can be anything they want (with no evaluation or critique). From the instructor’s point of view, I’ve often heard from composition instructors who say that they feel uneasy grading the creative writing in their classes for the same reason.

Marie Ponsot and Rosemary Deen suggest that the split between creative writing, literature, and composition have its roots in territorialism. They write that they “believe all students of writing are creative, that they are always writing about literature, and the



writing processes have basic commonalities” (190). They add, “The old, limiting distinctions, [they] maintain, were given primacy because they helped keep our selves and our academic territories well and safely sorted” (192). The territorialism that they talk about is not necessarily conscious or overt. I’m sure that when academics hold tightly onto traditional ways of dividing up an English department, they are doing so out of good intentions and prior knowledge. Just like emotion, this territorialism is often below the surface for those who participate in it.

Ironically, in his book *On Teaching and Writing Fiction*, Wallace Stegner describes the origin of creative writing classes as stemming from the traditional failures of composition classes and as a way to separate creative writing from freshman composition. He writes, “One suspects that ‘creative writing’ courses grew up partly because ordinary courses in composition had got bogged down in ‘correctness,’ gentility, and the handbook-and-exercise method, and some means had to be found to free students for the development of their natural interest and delight in language” (11). Of course, this is just Stegner’s opinion, but his comment points to the desire by those in the academy to think of creative writing and composition as entirely different courses. Stegner was teaching in the university system (1941-1971) before any legacies of the process movement influenced composition classes. How can we bring to composition the passion and emotion that still reside in creative writing classes? Stegner makes a similar comment as that of Robert Frost. He writes:

It is hard to believe that even the most intellectualized poets and novelists want their messages to come through cold. An emotional response in the reader,

corresponding to an emotional charge in the writer – some passion of vision or belief—is essential, and it is very difficult to achieve. It is also the thing that, once achieved, unmistakably distinguishes the artist in words from the everyday user of words. (15)

And so, it is not just the fault of the reason-laden academic who wants to put a barrier between the differences between creative writers and other writers. Stegner implies that the creative writers' connection to emotion is what makes them “special” writers, superior to writers of other genres. Perhaps if one expands his definition of artist to include writers other than novelists or poets, his argument is strengthened. Indeed, a key part this project is examining how emotion is an aspect of all writing and the discussions and teaching that surround it.

These gaps may be the way our writing classes are structured at the present time, but they are mere constructions. Yes, we have to have names for things. Certain writing processes must be labeled to be understood, but I am in agreement with Gayle Elliott who writes about the fact that art is considered to be an “expression of emotion” and that “the public/private, masculine/feminine split theorized by feminists (Jaggar, Whitbeck, Grumet) is mirrored within most English Departments” (101). The most recent example I have comes from a professor who wrote to the literature and composition lecturers about their upcoming courses. This professor was in charge of making sure the syllabi were written in a way that would pass the standards of the department. She wrote:

Unless you are teaching one of the designated creative writing courses, creative writing assignments should not make up a major part of the course grade. Especially for English 101 and 102, you should develop writing assignments that introduce students to college-level academic writing.

This statement clearly echoes the wishes of the department and the university, or at least the system that the professor has been trained within. In the rhetoric of her sentence, the professor communicates to the reader (the instructor, not faculty) that creativity in literature and composition classes is not as important as other (“academic”) types of writing. However, the wording itself is vague. What exactly does “creative project” mean in her eyes? How do we distinguish between creative and “academic”? Is creative not academic? The complexities of this issue are not even addressed in this letter. Furthermore, few instructors even questioned the email because the idea that creative writing has no place in a composition or literature course is already accepted within those who hold the most power in the university.

I include this example to show the way we are operating with terms that are simultaneously loaded with questions, but naturalized by the professor. Everyone understood what this professor was trying to communicate to us, but her message implied her own views of the differences between creative and critical writing and the understood view that just as emotion and reason are split, so are creativity and analysis. The most disturbing aspect of this sentence is that this professor’s view of “creative projects” has the backing of the whole university system. Those who question these views maybe seen as outside the most powerful structures within the field of English.

In *remembered rapture*, bell hooks engages the topic by quoting Nancy Mairs’s *Voice Lessons*. She writes:

I believe in the reality of the work. Period. I do not distinguish between creative and critical writing because all writing is creative....And all writing is critical, requiring the same shifting, selection, scrutiny and judgment of the material at hand. The distinctions are not useful except to people who want to engender an other with whom they can struggle and over whom they can gain power. And because they are useful in that way, they are dangerous.... Refusing to accept these distinctions was and remains a rebellious act, one that can challenge and disrupt hierarchical structures rooted in a politics of domination both within the academy and in the world outside. (qtd. in hooks "Rapture" 37)

In *Voice Lessons*, Mairs discusses her struggle to find her writing voice and how this struggle was influenced by the pressure from the academy to choose a writer-identity. As an academic and writer, Mairs noticed the problem with splitting writers' identities and the writing process. She writes, "In the ivory phallus [university], I had found, where poets hardly speak even to fiction writers (let alone to essayists, literary critics, and the like), the genres are like armed camps, and transgressing their boundaries can result in swift expulsion" (24). Mairs describes what happened when she was able to think and write while acknowledging both emotion and the intellect. She writes, "ideas erupted into and became indistinguishable from my emotional and even my corporeal life" (25). For Mairs, her identities between creative writer and academic scholar had more in common than not. And yet, she felt that it was necessary for her to choose one identity, or rather, there was much pressure for her to do so.

Interestingly enough, as I was researching this topic, I ran into an MFA graduate in the library, a poet. I asked him if he knew of any poets who address the subject of emotion when talking about poetry. His answer about the status of emotion in the academy was telling. He said that I'd see poets who fall into two camps: 1) the

community poet who talks about emotion, or 2) the academic poet who talks about technical aspects of poetry and analysis. He went on to tell me that poets are often concerned that they fall into the category of “emotion” bearers of the university and so try to move away from that “stigma.” On some level, they are aware that being associated with emotion threatens their status and power as academics. His statement illustrates that poets talk about emotion in carefully calculated ways even within their own culture outside of the university. This is because of their understanding of the dismissal that emotion can engender. They realize that they have to be precise about the way they talk about their poetry in order to acquire legitimacy as “serious” poets.

This example demonstrates the weighty influence of resigning critical thinking and creative thinking to different ways of knowing and how we’ve determined which realm has more power and status in the academy. On the one hand, creative writing is imbued with the traditional way of perceiving the creative arts: that they are individual endeavors and separate from our understanding of education. On the other hand, in order to garner resources and legitimacy, creative writing departments and teachers want to continue to participate in the university system. Universities offer creative writers the opportunity to be funded as writers and teachers.

You can see how this can have a profound effect on our students. They know from day one that what instructors think of as critical thinking has greater value and will offer more rewards to them. Even poets who know the importance of emotion are willing to turn away from this essential ingredient of their medium in order to legitimize their craft in the academic world.

The MFA graduate suggested that poets already know that emotion is a major factor in their work – that emotion surrounding creative writing does not have to be articulated because it is implicit in the subject matter itself. Yet other students in other subjects do not have the privilege of allowing emotion to be an acknowledged factor in their academic work.

One philosopher that may help us in our understanding of what happens when we put “creative” writing in one place and critical writing in another is Kenneth Burke. He writes, “if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality.” Thus, what we name something actually creates it. Different labels and words, “direct(ed) the attention differently, and thus led to a correspondingly different quality of observations” (“Language” 49). Everything is seen through what Burke calls a “terministic screen.” When we have the separation of critical/creative and emotion/thought, the way we talk about these splits reinforces their divisions. Burke writes:

Not only does the nature of our terms affect the nature of our observations, in the sense that the terms direct the attention to one field rather than to another. Also, many of the “observations” are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made spinning out of reality from possible terms. (46)

And so the way teachers and students talk about and choose terminology for creative writing versus writing that happens in composition alters the way both continue to think

about these subjects. For example, to label one kind of writing “creative” implies that other types of writing are not creative.

Ironically, the emotion of fear surrounds the concept of teacher-identity or writer-identity. Instead of exploring the nuances in writing, those in the academy must constantly define themselves and prove their worth through these definitions. Donald Murray comments on the perception of academic versus creative writing by saying, “In the academy....We seem to fear the creative and want to fence it off as if it would contaminate other forms of writing...” (112). But he finds that creative writers’ processes translate to strong academic writing. Murray defines writing as “an act of discovery” (112), whether or not the writer is writing to discover and develop ideas or characters. Murray references the feeling of discomfort that is supposed to be a part of the writing classroom. He writes, “My teacherly task is to make my students uncomfortable, to lead them into unknowing but not to abandon them there, but to be an effective Maine guide, paddling them towards the salmon, but allowing them to make their own catch” (108). Here, Murray is already identifying a pedagogy of discomfort, acknowledging that discomfort is not just a negative, but a space of learning in a writing class. Bartholomae reinforces Murray’s statement about the separation of English Studies, writing “I suspect that most of the problems in academic life – problems of teaching, problems of thinking – come from disciplinary boundaries and disciplinary habits [...] the charge to this generation and the next is to keep the field open, not to close it” (49).

This split between creative writing and other genres of writing is not just a characteristic of one institution. In a website message at one of my peers’ universities,

composition instructors were given the following message from the Director of

Composition:

We don't want to turn composition into the type of writing about literature courses with which students are most familiar from their high school courses... Rather than succumb to the pressure to substitute fiction and poetry for nonfiction books, essays, and articles, help students learn to read the work they're resisting... Your non English majors with thank you for not making them read poetry (again); your class will thank you for providing them with creative ways to engage with texts, and you'll have more fun.

Assumptions in this paragraph are many and varied. First of all, it is written in a tone as if it is the absolute truth. Within the message there is no theoretical debate, just a command from the department and the administration. This concerns me since the email was sent out to beginning instructors of composition who are in the process of learning about the field of composition. Second of all, the paragraph demonstrates the exact type of thinking that I am arguing against – the idea that fiction, poetry, all creative writing is completely separate from non-fiction and the type of writing that students are supposedly doing in composition courses. However, I do commend the professor for encouraging composition instructors to “learn to read the work they’re resisting.” This relates directly to the emotion involved with resistance because a text or a writing assignment is unfamiliar and not understood immediately. Unfortunately, the professor never suggests how the instructors might handle the resistance of students.



*Chaos, Emotion, and Creativity*

One aspect of writing that continues to crop up in my research and interviews is the way emotion is connected to the chaos that arises during the writing process. Obviously, writers cannot know what they write before they write it, but this characteristic of writing is particularly difficult in a culture that influences us to believe that not knowing something is always a negative. In many of my interviews, anxiety was connected to the writing process and to doubt and uncertainty. This anxiety may have to do with not having a linear path to understanding when it comes to writing. Creative writers, in particular, seem to understand the chaos involved in the writing process. Perhaps the idea of “art” implies mystery, the unknown, and emotion. But because art or creative writing is separated from other types of writing, this comfort with chaos is less accepted when discussing other genres or the genres that are often taught in composition. And yet, even writers of a linear piece of writing will have to encounter doubt, will have to understand doubt and anxiety and not shut down because of it. The most structured piece of writing doesn’t start out being that way; the author has to create to make it so.

Certainly, Elbow’s work is supposed to act as an antidote to a writer’s fear of chaos. Although a faculty member in his department has called him, “Write-It-Wrong-Elbow,” Elbow embraces the unknown and inchoate feelings associated with the writing process through the practice of freewriting. Inherent in this writing tool is the notion of Eugene Gendlin’s “felt sense.” Felt sense is a term used to name the “felt meaning” (Perl xv) that goes along with writing, how a writer can often feel what

he/she is trying to express before he/she actually gets the words right. Sondra Perl has taken Gendlin's theory and applied it to composition. She states that "knowing is embodied" and not knowing can actually be uncomfortable (52). Elbow's pedagogical tool of freewriting addresses the idea of getting muddled as a writer by not knowing what word to choose next.

However, many of Elbow's theories have simply gone out of fashion in the field of composition, or the practice of freewriting has been adopted without the theory behind it. Of course, this is due to the popularity of social constructivism and the idea that if language is considered to be social, then there is less of a concern for the writer and his/her felt sense or expression. And yet, just because language is a social construction does not negate the fact that writers are trying to express something from language and it often does not happen right away. One would think that scholars within the field of composition would have learned how to be comfortable with the unknown during the writing process. Despite Elbow's work, both instructors and students are still afraid and anxious during the writing process. Even very skilled writers, such as the ones I interview for the fifth chapter, have not mastered how to deal with the emotions that arise when they write. For some reason, creative writers do acknowledge the anxiety of the unknown that exists when creative thinking is involved.

According to Joseph Moxley, the editor of the collection *Creative Writing in America*, "we [teachers] need to inform students about the role of the unconscious and the right brain in composing" (34). He cites artists and thinkers from Rollo May to Albert

Einstein who understood that meaning does not necessarily come immediately. In order for students to understand how to handle doubt and uncertainty, Moxley suggests, “we certainly need to inform [them] to be receptive to unbidden images and exploratory, metaphorical thinking” (36). Moxley is not just referring to a creative writing issue, but a creative thinking one. Creative thinking extends to all disciplines, not just the teaching of poetry or fiction, but any subject matter that encourages the ideas of discovery and learning.

In the anthology *50 Contemporary Poets*, authors touch upon the way emotion is intertwined with the writing process. They suggest that the emotion of the poet is tied to something not conscious – something unknown and in the body. Although these writers are describing the use of emotion differently than Langer and Berthoff because they are reinforcing the binaries between thought and emotion, at least they have an understanding of emotion’s essential role in their writing processes. “All the evidence suggests that whether the poet is aware of it or not, *emotion* (mood) determines what ideas and bits of experience are to become poems. The *intellect* can only recognize these, and the will can only apply the choices of the intellect after the emotion has determined the poem’s direction and tone” (Turner 3). Furthermore, one can hardly blame the poet for discussing emotions as separate from cognition when there is hardly an adequate way of talking about them. The first step towards a helpful rhetoric of emotion is to understand emotion’s value in writing.

How does our thinking about the process shape the way we experience and teach it? In an academic culture that equates knowing with the idea of conquering, in English

classes where students think they need to know the answers before wrestling with them are we really teaching students what to expect from the act of writing? Are we teaching students how to be comfortable with not knowing, and why is this so important? Berthoff explores how writing and meaning come from chaos. “The chief use of chaos is that it creates the need for that dialogue” (“Making” 72). Chaos is a difficult place to be in since we have learned early on that we need to know the meanings of things. Without the ability to stay in the chaos of the writing process, a place that might be difficult to endure, students will lose an important thinking space.

Scholars from other disciplines besides composition also acknowledge the chaos and emotion involved in creativity. In *Creativity and Affect*, Melvin P. Shaw interviewed scholars in fields ranging from psychology to biology and all interviewees commented on some aspect of what Shaw calls “deterministic chaos” in the creative process. He cites rejection and failure as aspects of the creative process that bring about emotions such as: “anger, fear, worthlessness, depression, shame, and so on” (37). He even notes “a primary educational component should be the teaching of the affective features of the creative process. Imagine all the talent wasted by those who are ignorant or unappreciative of the role that feelings play in the process” (37). There have been some attempts to deal with these features of the writing process, and I will discuss them at the end of the chapter. However, I am concerned that even these exercises are either dismissed or considered to be extras to the “real” writing that should be taking place in a composition course. Any technique or exercise that does not visibly fit into the slot of reason or “academic” is looked at skeptically.

There are many reasons why a student will abandon a writing project, but one reason is that we are not trained to wrestle with the emotions that can arise during the act of composition. In *The Short Story* by Kenneth Payson Kempton, the author describes the writing process and the imagination. He writes, “The chronology of composition itself, in fact, and in the hardest professionals as in the greenest tyro, may be closely similar to the course of manic-depressive psychosis” (25). He then describes the emotional stages of writing, ranging from ecstasy to despair. Although I am not bringing this up as in any way a scientific fact, it is an acknowledgement that the emotional aspect of writing is not a minor part of the process. Kempton also discusses the imagination in terms of emotion. He writes, “The creative imagination, indeed, is partly this very readiness and ability to seize upon symbols for their emotional value” (28). Thus, emotion is inherent in the process and the product for both creator and audience.

Berthoff writes, “If your students are to learn the uses of chaos, we will have to learn ways of teaching them to tolerate ambiguity and be patient with their beginnings” (“Making” 39). Perhaps when Berthoff uses the terms “tolerate ambiguity,” she refers to the ambiguity in the writer’s ability to emotionally tolerate the space that comes before meaning is solidified in the writer’s mind. Berthoff does state that the chaotic aspect of the writing process is scary. Many writers can recognize the terror associated with the blank page before them and an urge to write into the unknown. How can we teach this if we (teachers) do not know how to do this? Do creative writers acknowledge and allow chaos as part of the process? Stegner agrees with Berthoff. He writes, “It is the job of the serious artist to bring order where no order was before him....He has for material the

whole of his experience....[this experience] is apt to be utter chaos....What he does is shape it into patterns of words..." (3-4).

This idea of chaos within the process of writing is echoed in other writers. In the following section from Gregory Orr's piece on NPR, he repeats what Stegner (and others) have said about chaos, writing about how emotion is a major part of his writing process, how writing gives him agency over his emotions, and how writing is essential to a sharing of emotion with others:

When I write a poem, I process experience. I take what's inside me – the raw, chaotic material of feeling or memory – and translate it into words and then shape those words into the rhythmical language we call a poem. This process brings me a kind of wild joy. Before I was powerless and passive in the face of my confusion, but now I am active: the powerful shaper of my experience. I am transforming it into a lucid meaning. Because poems are meanings, even the saddest poem I write is proof that I want to survive. And therefore it represents an affirmation of life in all its complexities and contradictions. An additional miracle comes to me as the maker of poems: Because poems can be shared between poet and audience, they also become a further triumph over human isolation. (Orr)

Orr, a poet and teacher, provides a writer's perspective on the creation of poems, but reiterates that the act of creation does involve emotion and thought, individual experience, and social experience. In essence, Orr's very personal perspective also strengthens Berthoff's statement that through the chaos of the writer's experience comes the need for dialogue, for the other. In that sense, even in its most basic form emotion in the writing process is tied to a need to share and communicate with an audience.

The messages from Orr, Stegner (and, of course, Berthoff) appear to be quite similar to the goals that instructors have for students of the composition class.

Instructors want students to cultivate their writing voices, find agency through writing, discover and explore their own experiences while connecting the world and the experiences of others.

Forging ahead with the idea of discovery instead of fear is imperative for beginning writers and all writers. In *On Becoming An Artist*, psychologist Ellen Langer examines the importance of failing as a creator, learning from mistakes, and seeing the “value of uncertainty” (12). Langer quotes Picasso, who said, “I don’t know in advance what I am going to put on canvas any more than I decide beforehand what colors I’m going to use” (21). What Picasso and Langer are saying echoes the freewriting method that Elbow suggested writers use. However, in many ways Elbow’s freewriting method has become just a tool, instead of a way to conceptualize the writing process. Instructors may incorporate freewriting into their classes, but then the theory behind it seems to fade away or not be discussed. The fear and anxiety of the not-quite-formed during the writing process is often not addressed after the first writing step. In fact, I would argue that there may be even more fear and anxiety and emotional reactions to the revision process when students must come to terms with the messiness and imperfections of initial drafts.

*White Heat, Dark Waters, and Magic: The Ways Creative Writers Talk about Emotion*

I have a poet friend who aims for the “white heat” of writing a poem, stays up until four a.m. to get to that emotional space, but cannot stand the idea of “process writing.” She hates all talk of the writing process, but will fully admit that writing poetry

can be painful, and she will stay up as late as necessary to break any resistance she has to experiencing the emotions of writing. I often wonder why she has such disdain for the word “process.” I also cannot help wondering if it has something to do with the way she has been trained as a writer and what she has been taught about how she should think about writing. She does have a process. Her resistance to calling it a “process” is reminiscent of the myth that creative writing is “magic” and that composition and rhetorical theories have no place in a writing class. This goes along with the idea that the best way to write creatively is to intuit everything and pretend that it just “happens.” The truth is that even if a fiction writer or poet is unaware of what he/she is learning rhetorically, he/she learns how to apply it to future writing pieces. One can see how this works to separate creative writing from composition.

Although creative writers seem to associate with emotion and writing differently than compositionists, they still use clever metaphors for their emotional experiences. One professor called the emotion between story and writer as “the dark waters” and he encourages students to “mine them.” My poet friend refers to Emily Dickinson’s “white heat” to discuss the emotional state of composing. These metaphors demonstrate an acknowledgement that emotion exists in the writing process, but they also show the cultural urge to separate it from cognition, to resist actually talking about it, to keep emotion mysterious, ineffable, and indefinable. Telling students to “mine the dark waters” of their minds may leave these writers even more confused than when they began. Emotions during the writing process can be frightening, but this metaphor solidifies the idea that the emotions connected to writing are always unknowable, vague,



ominous, and out-of-control. If one is “mining the dark waters” one wonders what he/she is mining for and when there will be an explosion or a sudden drowning.

When I asked my poet friend about how she handles the emotion that goes along with the writing process, she cited a former teacher, saying:

I’m very lucky to have had a teacher who encouraged me to write when I didn’t feel like it. I don’t remember exactly what she said, but I know it’s had a profound impact on how I think about writing. She said something along the lines of, “When you least feel like writing, that’s the best time to write.” There’s this idea that a person has to ‘feel it’ or be ‘in the mood’ to write, and I guess this relates to ‘the muse’ and when ‘the muse’ is speaking to you...[My teacher] advised us to write when high, when low, when elated, when outraged, when bubbly, when troubled, when confused, even when bored. To consider all of these moods, or feelings, as muses and to write from them.

What this poet’s teacher is suggesting constitutes a certain amount of faith and belief and confidence in the human mind. This notion that we have to be in-control and “rational” to write productively is questionable. I know that in my own experience I can never recall exactly what emotion I was having when I wrote something. There’s not always a direct correlation between present writing moment and the page. Perhaps the process is more complex than that. However, in chapter five, writing instructors repeatedly state their desire to “deal with” or “get away from” the anxiety that accompanies writing. If their emotions were not considered a barrier, but an asset, one wonders what would happen with their writing.

According to writer Stephen King, the need to cause the reader to “prickle with recognition” is an ongoing goal for the writer (174). “The feelings expressed by a

successful poet or writer create the semblance of events lived and felt. In effect the shared feelings of the writer and the reader carry the argument” (Lyons 276). Not only does the writer experience emotion, but (as Robert Frost states) this emotion is conveyed to the reader. Sometimes, this urge to convey the writer’s feelings or sense or perspective might not even be articulated or known to the author before its actual existence. Langer writes, “because in the process of manipulating its elements all sorts of possibilities of form appear that he recognizes as organically motivated...the artist is the first person to see a new quality arise, which he develops as best he can, capturing a new feeling which he could not have conceived before” (“Mind” 114). This movement, this creation, happens in the moment and leads to other creation. This points to the theory that each creative thought must be allowed, if not for itself, then for the thoughts that will follow. Not just for “creative” work, but any type of thinking.

The idea to slow down and reflect on the emotions involved in the act of composition is often overlooked. Nancy Welch introduced the learning tool of sideshadowing to document and explore how emotions surrounding writing can lead to possibilities for a text. In this exercise, students respond to the text with questions, concerns, thinking and emotions that the text evokes. Welch describes a graduate seminar in which the professor and graduate students discuss an undergraduate’s text in detail. Welch writes:

What isn’t considered [by professor and students], isn’t discussed: that the student might contribute to and gain from such rich discussion about her text,

that she may already sense its competing and dissonant modes, might also introduce into the discussion questions, worries, and stories about this draft's composition that are not apparent on the page. (275-276)

Because of teachers' resistance to reflecting on students' "chaos," many instructors overlook a way of thinking about a student's writing that may be a rich source of learning.

One creative writing instructor, Phil Schultz, the founder of The Writer's Studio in New York City, and a recent winner of the Pulitzer Prize in poetry, exposes the emotional connection between writer and his/her writing, acknowledges it, and uses it in his creative writing workshops. A question he often asks his writers is, "What were you feeling when you wrote this?" (qtd. in Bock). "On some level people are afraid of what's inside them...the right craft, or persona gives you the right distance to access emotion" (qtd. in Bock). Thus for Schultz, the job of the writer is twofold. He/she has to work on accessing his/her emotions to tap into powerful topics and writing, but also learn how to manage the emotions that the act of writing conjures. "For Schultz, it is impossible to underestimate the obstacles that writers create for themselves" (Bock). In his fiction courses, he discusses self-defeating emotions that keep writers away from their strongest material and that "the right craft or persona gives you the right distance to access emotion" (qtd. in Bock). Thus, it is a combination of emotion and analysis that go into a powerful story. Although other writers, such as Frost, have mentioned this combination previously, it is interesting that Schultz actually teaches writing in this way. The subjects that hold the most passion for a writer can also be the most emotionally

difficult to think about and write; however, these are the topics that make for the best writing.

*Mending the Creative/Critical and Emotion/Reason Divide Through Re-Invention*

If our culture thinks of reason on one side and emotion on the other, it is no surprise that creative writing becomes associated with the emotion side of experience. From Plato to the Renaissance, the creative writer, the poet, was connected to divine inspiration and passion, while the prose writer succeeded in the more mundane realms. This division has persisted to the way courses are categorized presently. However, this split does not accurately illustrate the mental processes of the writer. Furthermore, this dichotomy may hurt the teaching of creative writing, as well as the teaching of composition in its current form. For creative writers, this idea that creativity stems only from emotion and is disconnected from cognition leaves out the careful analysis required to shape a poem or story. It encourages beginning student writers to believe that emotion on the page without critique is valid as a finished product.

In certain ways, the idea about the purpose of creative writing classes in the university has changed. In *The Elephants Teach*, D.G. Myers takes a historical look at the origins of creative writing in the university. He writes, “The goal—an educational one—was to reform and redefine the academic study of literature, establishing a means for approaching it ‘creatively’” Creative writing courses were not seen as separate from literary studies or composition, but as a way to study literature from the experience of the writer. He writes, “Creative writing was the name that might have been given to any

effort that undertook to restore the idea of literature as an integrated discipline of thought and activity, of textual study and practical technique” (4). What a student could learn from the writing of creative writing was the one of the most important aspects of it. One of the essential questions as Paul Dawson puts it is “what constitutes knowledge in Creative Writing?” and, I would add, what constitutes knowledge in English Studies? At some point, Dawson describes that the major way to understand literature was by the critical study of it “rather than to absorb scholarly knowledge of it” (7). Therefore, there is much to be learned about literature and writing by the study of it from the writer’s perspective.

Ultimately, instructors must explore the emotions attached to teacher-identity, writer-identity, the writing process and the issues involved in segregating creative writing from other types of writing in English Studies. When talking specifically about emotion and writing, instructors must question how and why emotion is associated with creative writing, why the institution separates creative thinking from any other kind of thinking, and why it is assumed that creativity comes only occurs in classes where poetry and fiction are taught when creative thinking is necessary for all types of thinking. Furthermore, composition instructors need to re-evaluate how they separate creative writing from other genres, and whether this separation is beneficial to beginning writers.

### *The Workshop Revisited*

This chapter began with the story of a workshop to illustrate the differences between creative writing and composition courses. Although composition classes use the

workshop as a tool in the teaching of writing, it is just one tool in the composition instructor's repertoire. In the field of creative writing, emotion is not supposed to be a part of the workshop. The workshop is a rational place, a space where words are evaluated purely from the class members' and instructor's perspectives. These perspectives, though sometimes extremely helpful, can act as a hindrance to innovation. Ironically, although emotion of the writer is absent from the process, writers end up talking about emotion in their processes. The point is not that workshops are evil; rather, they are representative of the inconsistencies and dichotomies within the field of creative writing itself and how these carry over to the discussions among specializations within English Departments.

## CHAPTER IV

### “OUTLAW” EMOTIONS AND THE OTHER

Before my classes when students will be talking about race, sex, or gender, I can feel it. Anticipation comes, a panic, a wondering what will happen next. Although I know I am in charge of the class, the human element often determines the way discussions will flow (or not flow). In composition classes where we sometimes try to discover where injustice lies in our country, where we encourage students to pull away from what they have been socialized to believe and take a critical look, we are bound to introduce emotionally charged topics to the class either through reading or writing assignments. These topics often relate to racism or sexism, subjects that are political, personal, and have the potential to be highly emotional.

Although teachers and students rarely uncover all the facets of our conversations, the emotional undercurrent that runs through our discussions is often left untouched and hidden. We provoke buried experiences to come to life and rattle the very belief systems of our students as we try to have them reflect upon the world. However, the students are not the only ones left to grapple with these subjects. Teachers, too, engage in inquiry that we know may dredge up our own experiences, often emotional, and yet we know that we are the responsible ones, the ones who must navigate and manage the responses of our students. These emotions, like unseen ghosts, are there with discussions that revolve around race, gender, and sex.

Complicating matters even more, our culture often associates emotion with minority groups. Our Western, binary-thinking society often attaches emotion to the female gender and logic or reason to the male gender. Given women's historically limited power in shaping our cultural views, it is no surprise that women are associated with the less powerful of the two. These associations with women's emotion have broadened to include anyone who is oppressed by dominant ideology and who happens to react on an emotional level.

The way emotions are culturally categorized has a real effect on how they are perceived and discussed. According to Sue Campbell, one common reaction to anger from a minority group is to label that emotion as "bitter," thus, stripping the reaction of its legitimacy (49). Our connotations of the word "bitter" are far different from those of the word "anger." Bitter connotes an anger past its prime, an ongoing stewing of negativity that can never be solved by action. Although this label (bitter) is often associated with women, it can carry over to anyone being oppressed. As Campbell writes: "Bitterness does not always involve gender....The angry disadvantaged of a society – visible minorities, aboriginals, the working class, the disabled, the ill, the divorced, and the old – are all targets of this critique" (49-50). Thus, any oppressed people can be silenced through the way we view and label emotional responses. Furthermore, this label is often influenced by the speaker's reaction to the emotional event. Campbell pinpoints a pivotal aspect of emotional expression, that of "social uptake," a term coined by Marilyn Frye (48). Social uptake refers to allowing an emotion to be heard and reflected upon. One reason someone's anger might be labeled as bitter is because this anger was not



allowed social uptake. In this way, Campbell and Frye reiterate the social nature of emotions. If a person's anger is constantly categorized as bitter, it is quite likely that the anger as an expression will lose its rhetorical meaning or power for further discussion.

It is only logical that people should emote when they feel real pain. Universities offer opportunities for having discussions that attempt to counteract oppression, but they also have codes, rules, and expectations about emotion that dictate the way it can be expressed. There is a real stigma to the display of emotions in academic spaces. The consequence of these expectations and fears is an avoidance of emotion at all costs. What happens is that the very people or reactions that are necessary to make changes in the way we discuss oppression are either silenced or further oppressed by expectations that they be objective, balanced and rational or that they fall along familiar, and codified lines, and common narratives about the subject. Does our language and the limited ways we talk about emotion reinscribe oppression?

In composition classes, instructors introduce emotionally-charged subject matter, but there is a lot of confusion and lack of knowledge or attention paid to how these discussions should proceed. When we introduce subjects such as racism or sexism, we are stirring up topics that have the potential to challenge the prescribed rhetoric of the academic institution. On the one hand, we want to discuss these topics. It is our job to do so. On the other hand, teachers fear the emotional reaction that may ensue. As bell hooks writes, "Often teachers want to ignore emotional feeling in the classroom because they fear the conflict that may arise" ("Community" 34). This fear of emotion may hinder deep interrogation of a subject and one major consequence of this is that we never leave

the prescribed “way” of thinking and speaking about these topics. And since the topics that produce the most tension and fear in the classroom are the ones that connect to oppressed people, the oppression remains. Our discussions barely scratch the surface of deep, meaningful communication. Either our discussions fall along familiar lines or silence ensues. Both avenues allow injustice to remain.

### *The Schooling of Emotion*

One other level of emotion and thought at work during discussions in composition classes appears in the form of our language use. That is, how the actual language choices teachers and students make within these discussions carve out the way we understand the world and our emotions. In “Going Postal,” Worsham analyzes how language in education shapes our “affective relations to the world” (232). She uses the phrases “going postal” and “wilding” to show how the violent culture that produced these phrases and actions cultivates and sustains them through education. Worsham examines how our usage of these terms naturalize them. She writes “that if our commitment is to real individual and social change” – I believe that the field of composition leans towards the understanding that it is – then “the work of decolonization must occur at the affective level” (233). She adds, “...our most urgent political and pedagogical task remains the fundamental reeducation of emotion” (233). According to Worsham, we are “schooled” in emotion, taught through education how to have “an affective relation to the world, to oneself, and to others” (236). That is, if our understanding of emotion is socially constructed, then school teaches cultural understandings and expectations regarding

emotion. If left unanalyzed, these expectations will continue to be structured in such a way as to support dominant ideology. Furthermore, this education on emotion is conveyed through discourse, through language. Worsham argues that perhaps this is the most powerful way that we learn how to relate to the world, and without reflecting on emotion and the way it is operating, we are essentially taught affective relations that “support the legitimacy of dominant interests...especially appropriate to gender, race, and class locations” (240). Therefore, by failing to examine emotion and pedagogy, dominant interests and power differentials prevail. In a certain way, Worsham’s argument makes it clear why many may dismiss the importance of emotion in the classroom. Simply, it is not in their benefit to do so. Also, educators with any authority have been emotionally “schooled” in the dominant educational system for many years. By the time TAs become instructors and professors, they have already been indoctrinated into a system that both proliferates a certain emotional agenda (repressed emotion) and denies any other.

We can observe this comment in action in our classes when teachers or students introduce subjects that provoke emotional responses. The most important social issues of our time – racism, sexism, any deeply embedded notion of otherness – have a hold on us on an affective level. And yet, the most emotionally charged materials are the most urgent topics that need to be discussed for social or individual transformation. Within the field of education and within a class that focuses on language we are left with an agenda of either cultivating or deconstructing the way language supports dominant ideology.

Thus, there is a real political dimension to emotion that teachers and students fail to recognize. As Boler discusses in *Feeling Power*, emotions are political in two ways

and can be used to “catalyze social and political movements” (7). First, many social changes that occur are fought for because of pain experienced and the anger that follows. Fighting against injustice takes energy and resources. To organize individuals for a cause there needs to be an urgent need. This need usually comes from essential emotions, such as anger and pain. When Boler discusses “fuel” for political movements, she is talking about using the pain to get people to take action. She discusses how the Civil Rights Movement was created by people who “were angry about the disenfranchisement, segregation, and systematic violence towards African Americans” (7). As George E. Marcus describes in *The Sentimental Citizen*, emotion is absolutely necessary to impel a citizen to act against an injustice (141). He writes, “A singularly rational citizen, without emotion, will not react when presented with spectacle and therefore will not invest in learning what significance the situation may hold” (141). Although Marcus splits emotion and reason in his theories, he does make the point that social injustice will remain if citizens view these injustices with no emotion. As he puts it “The rational citizen, while able to use reason, cannot enact her or his own recommendations. The sentimental citizen can” (141).

Second, emotions are also political because they are a way for “dominant groups to mark those oppressed as lacking rationale for their described injustices” (Boler 7). This is certainly a way to cancel out the energy that could be used to fuel a political movement. And yet, emotion cannot be a powerful tool for change if it is repressed and/or stigmatized. In “Love and Knowledge,” Jaggar writes that any emotion that goes against the dominant culture’s codes is often viewed as an “outlaw emotion.” These

“outlaw emotions” are often connected to feminism and the anger that women (or any marginalized group) feel because they are oppressed. By focusing on the “outlaw emotion,” as opposed to the existing injustice, the injustice is allowed to take precedence over the *reaction* to it. Controlling this type of emotion is not that difficult considering the fact that our culture has been socialized to dismiss emotion, especially when emotions are imbued with anger.

According to Campbell, strong emotions are often dismissed because they are marked as gendered female and suggest connotations of the stereotype of a crazy, irrational woman (48). Groups who are oppressed are more likely to display emotions in arenas that are designated as “rational zones” by dominant ideology. Obviously, classrooms are often categorized as “rational zones.” The question is: How do we change the way we talk about subjects when the emotional components of them are pushed aside or difficult to decipher?

In order to create the kind of composition classrooms we want – full of risk, creativity, critical thinking, and passionate writers – we need to begin to acknowledge the emotions of our students and as students and teachers look at them critically. Teachers are sometimes unaware of the ways that subject matter can evoke emotions in our students and how these emotions can eventually effect the learning that will follow, or, if we are aware, we try to ignore or dismiss the mounting emotions of students for fear that the class will become “out of control.” Mary Ann Cain writes in her article, “Moved by ‘Their’ Words: Emotion and the Participant Observer” that “discussions about the emotional that do not fall into ‘specific, severely encoded ways’ are rare. Such

discussions tend to enfold the emotional within the question of ‘the personal’ as something to either embrace or ignore but not to critically engage” (43). One problem with this stance is the denial that the personal matters, that the personal is linked with the political and social. Another problem with our reactions to emotion is our lack of understanding of the critical opportunities that they often bring to light. At the very least, emotion can act as a guidepost showing instructors places where critical thinking can deepen and highlighting the aspects of discussions that matter to students and to our culture. In these times of widespread violence and potential apathy, it is critical that teachers interrogate the emotions in their classrooms, both visible and vocal and invisible and silent.

And yet, there is a fine line between honoring the personal source of our writing passions, and allowing the class to disintegrate into a group therapy session of emotional mush. Where do we draw that line? I don’t know if anyone can tell us for sure, but certainly denying emotion entirely is not the answer while examining and talking about emotions might be.

In her essay “The Stories We Tell: Acknowledging Emotions in the Classroom,” Deborah Chappel recalls being a member of the Jane Tompkins’s class that inspired the article “The Pedagogy of the Distressed.” She writes:

I was suddenly aware in that moment in Tompkins’s class how relentlessly I’d been taught to keep overt displays of emotion and even conscious recognition of emotion out of the learning environment, to such an extreme that even to see a student really caring what went on in the classroom embarrassed and frightened me. (21)

As an instructor herself, Chappel sensed that acting as a “disembodied brain” (21), a devil’s advocate with no emotion grounded in her own identity, rang false. And yet, when she did display emotion, she felt stripped of her authority.

### *Emotion and Gender, Race, and Sexual Identity*

Any writing or discussion subject that holds passion will be personal and emotional to students. I’ve encountered several experiences that made me contemplate how powerful emotions are in the classroom, but also saw how I pretended that they were secondary to the critical thinking that happened. One strong example in particular occurred in a graduate class called “Women Writing Culture.” Although I was a student in the class rather than a teacher, the incident brought to light not only our fear of the emotional in the classroom, but how these same emotions can unleash the energy needed for a liberatory classroom.

The class examined women’s rhetoric and we discussed authors including Trinh T. Min-Ha, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, and several others. Throughout the semester we discussed how women’s voices were heard or silenced. In addition, we read Ruth Behar’s *Translated Woman*, an ethnography about a Mexican peasant, Esperanza, her experiences as a woman in an oppressive society, and Behar’s reaction to and relationship to these experiences. As a class, we kept returning to the ethics of ethnography and whether or not researchers abided by methods that coincided with feminist principles. The instructor had explained that she created the course to foster the principles of community, the decentralizing of teacher authority, and collaboration among graduate students. Much of

the subject matter of the course dealt with power differentials and how women could empower other women and themselves. Furthermore, since everyone in the class was female, our readings and discussions touched upon topics that related to our lives and experiences in some way.

From the first day, it was apparent that in a room full of female graduate students, discussions about feminist issues could become extremely personal and intense. There was a constant cross-over between public issues and personal experience. However, even though our discussions seemed to be full of angst-ridden vocal tones, anger, and responses deeply wedded to personal identities, the students in the class seemed to ignore how personal each discussion felt. The class was a cross-section of graduate students in different places in life. Some were young single women, others were mothers and married; various classes, religions, and regions (both Southern and Northern) were represented. The class was mostly Caucasian, but included one African American and one Native American. Because the class was all-female and geared towards women's rhetoric, it seemed as if students felt much more comfortable sharing their opinions and feelings (compared to other classes). Throughout graduate courses, students are aware of expectations and academic performances; therefore, it was an unusual space to find ourselves in, whereby each class ended with final words from each student as we passed around a talking stick (which happened to be a small statue of a naked woman) in the spirit of Native American talking circles. The instructor encouraged students to share what they thought and felt about the texts and topics. One discussion on the ethics of ethnography centered around a cinematographer who infiltrated an Appalachian town and



was ultimately murdered by community insiders who felt exploited by his intrusion.

Although I understood the research subjects' anger, I couldn't understand how that anger led to murder. However, I hailed from the North and had no social connection to that region of North Carolina. There were students in that class who were much more tied to the region and sided much more with the Appalachian community. I was certainly surprised at this reaction, but experience (and emotion) turned out to be a major factor in how we analyzed the documentary. These students understood how the anger of the town could lead to violence while I couldn't conceive of it.

One major assignment for this course was a paper on a women's issue. The paper topic was open-ended, but a mini-ethnography was one of the choices for a topic.

Another student and I thought that a meta-ethnography, an ethnography on the class, would be an interesting paper topic. Since the assignment had just been given out and we were not yet committed to the project, we hadn't requested permission from the instructor or the class. Instead, we began to take notes on the way people acted in class and what they said just to see if the class was even worth writing about. As this student and I took notes, we noticed certain social and political camps in the class. Not every student took part in these discussions, but we noticed an atmosphere of competition, which indicated a lack of community among groups. When the teacher randomly put together work groups, one group requested to be together because they knew each other. Although this decision seemed innocuous enough, it detracted from the philosophy behind group work. Then, when it was time for groups to choose a woman's theorist from a list of authors, this group sought out the professor ahead of time because they wanted to get first choice.

Again, these instances are minor, but they worked to establish an environment that was less than communal. In addition, this separatist attitude became clear during class discussion based on who listened to whom and the reactions that followed. In a class that was supposed to be about collaboration, community, and female support, it seemed to function just as any competitive academic course. Perhaps it was even *more* competitive. Perhaps it was an example of the oppressed becoming the oppressor. Students in the class were already trained to function in the hierarchal world of the academy and weren't adapting well to the implementation of feminist principles to the class. Needless to say, my peer and I looked down at our notes and saw evidence of these emotional tensions.

On the day of the most contentious incident, we were discussing *Translated Woman* by Ruth Behar, an ethnography about sisterhood and Esperanza's experiences, when my peer (the one writing the paper with me) accused the class of failing to put into practice their own feminist theories. In the section that we were discussing, Esperanza encountered backbiting and gossip from her peers, and a lack of emotional support from them when dealing with difficulties stemming from male oppressors. In an outburst that seemed accusatory and tense this student said, "There is backbiting going on in this class right now." Several students appeared shocked and replied that all discussions were in the context of a spirited debate. Many students in the class perceived this outburst as a purely personal act. However, the reverberations of this comment lasted a week. Many students contacted the professor privately, convinced that she (each person) had been the guilty, backbiting person. Students were upset and took the comment personally. Many of them discussed the incident with students outside of the class, asking for commentary and

analysis. When this student spoke in class, I remember cringing and thinking, “Yes, this class has some issues among us, but please stop forcing them out into the atmosphere of the class and making us deal with them. We’d all be much more comfortable ignoring the tension.”

In essence, the reaction to the student’s comment became more interesting and worthy of discussion than the incident itself. The responses were dramatic to say the least. There were students who voiced distress over the student and my note taking. Needless to say, we dropped the idea of the ethnography paper immediately. The heightened emotion of the class and the student’s comment exposing it shows that even when emotion pushes its way to the surface, we still try to ignore it or bury it in part because we do not have the language to discuss it.

Even though responses during that week became emotional, intense, personal, and biased, the teacher and the student who spoke, along with the other students in the class, decided to take a critical, reflective look at the statement, our own reactions, and how they fit into the subject matter and aim of the course. In truth, our responses in class had been much more emotional than we first admitted, inevitable when talking about subjects such as rape, abuse, race, and the exploitation of minorities.

The student took a look at her own behavior and the reaction from the class. In addition, we were asked to briefly discuss and think about what had happened. To be honest, I was afraid that the class would never recover, and be drawn with battle lines of alliances and enemies that would ultimately affect our learning. But by reflecting on our emotional attachment and by becoming aware of how this was affecting our intellectual

engagement, the class made a turn, changed in some way. Students began to really listen to each other. Participants consciously tried to proceed in the spirit of feminism, listening and looking for change. I know that before the incident I would shut down when certain members spoke, already mentally dismissing their ideas because I knew they would come from a side I disagreed with. Because of the incident and the subsequent reflection, I found myself trying to keep my mind consciously open and tried to truly listen to what my peers were saying. The act of listening had become important to the content of the class, the topic of feminism, and the issue of creating power and support for women in the world. The incident pointed to the very subject that we were supposed to be exploring – feminism, culture, and women's expression.

It is apparent that we need to give emotions a space in our classrooms. Teachers spend time assuming the reactions of students, but what if emotions about the class were addressed through writing and/or a discussion forum? Perhaps students' emotions will stay the same, but perhaps opening a dialogue will allow both students and teachers to adjust their perceptions and actions accordingly. For example, the feminist classroom incident – whether or not the student was appropriate or offensive – opened up discussion about the way we perceived each other's behavior in the class. Our awareness became heightened over the issue of how we were reacting to each other's comments and attitudes. I know the incident caused me to make a conscious decision to remain emotionally and academically open and to listen.

However, all interpretations of the event didn't mirror mine. One peer told me that she was more confused about the comment than anything else. By that time in the

semester she had shut down to any emotions that went along with feminism. When she witnessed the emotional outburst, she had already shut down and removed herself from the emotional dynamics of the class. This student perceived the event as a personal one caused by personality traits of certain individuals in the class. She wondered why many of the participants didn't just keep their emotions to themselves.

Many instructors say they shy away from any student responses that seemed "too emotional." I agree that emotions are risky, unpredictable elements in a classroom, but whether we look at them critically or not, they are always there, simmering below the surface, and also can be fuel for the writing, thinking, and changing that we do in a composition classroom. The emotions of students are not just learning elements to be ignored, but possible places of opportunity, places to open up and look at critically.

Deborah Chappel suggests that:

The emotions beneath the surface in the classroom, those outlaw emotions that seem inappropriate in the learning environment, are the energy source for radical pedagogy. Productively tapping into these emotions requires a concentrated and sophisticated understanding of the emotions at play in the learning environment, and such awareness cannot be achieved without frank discussion among ourselves and our students. (23)

Therefore, the more we ignore emotion, the less we will be able to utilize emotion in the classroom. According to Chappel, moments of emotion might be where real learning occurs, the kind of learning that transforms the way people think about themselves and the world.

One interesting (or problematic) aspect of thinking about emotion is that emotion can be invisible in the classroom. We cannot always know through external expression what our students are feeling. I am particularly concerned with the way we discuss race in our composition classes and how emotion plays an often ignored role in these discussions. In my experience, it is very easy for these discussions to fall into “encoded ways.” As Boler puts it, “Silence and omission are by no means neutral. One of the central manifestations of racism, sexism, and homophobia is ‘erasure’” (184). The silence in the classroom might be because of emotional responses to subject matter. In the case of discussions about race, the ideas and beliefs we hold are connected to us on a deep emotional level. At this point of time in our culture we are at a dangerous place in terms of our open discussions about this topic, especially in the university. On many levels we have stunted our racial discussions because of fear.

If as hooks writes in *Teaching Community: Pedagogy of Hope*, “Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, and transcendence” (43), how are we to accomplish this liberation if we are having discussions about race that barely scratch the surface, that divide along racial lines, that are not as honest and real as they can possibly be? There is a “walking on eggshells feel” especially when it comes to race. No one wants to offend anyone else. We are not having honest discussions about race because we are ignoring and avoiding the heightened emotions that go along with this subject. There is always a possibility that the class will become “too emotional” and let’s face it, we are not really trained to allow emotions into our academic, reason-filled classrooms. And, of course, there’s always the fear that words will be taken out of

context. Will the language police come and arrest us? I always have this underlying fear that one wrong step and one misplaced word will be blown out of proportion and someone will go home in tears, maybe even me. This fear circulates between teacher and student. And I've begun to wonder if this fear hinders our students and ourselves. Do students only say what they want us to hear? Are we, as teachers, so afraid of offending someone that we are not doing our jobs and pushing our students to uncomfortable pedagogical places?

In his preface to *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*, Keith Gilyard implores composition instructors to begin to look at race critically. He states that discussion about race “has been emotive rather than analytic” (ix). He writes, “theorizing race has yet to catch up with all the personal, albeit necessary, reflections in classrooms and professional outlets” (ix). I agree with Gilyard that it seems as if emotive reactions to race are often places where discussions end. I agree that instructors need to theorize race. However, instructors also need to theorize emotion when it comes to race. Emotion is not just a category to get through in order to begin the “real work” of critical thinking. Rather, it is a part of critical thinking. Perhaps the only way to “render visible the implicit yet dominant discourses on race, racism, and identity” (ix) is to make visible the emotion that goes along with these discourses.

Let me share with you one particular incident occurred in my classroom two years ago that made me aware of how we have failed to be as honest as we can be when of discussing issues of race in the classroom. Here's what happened: During a speaking-intensive composition class, I asked the students to choose their own topics to present to

the class and then facilitate class discussion on this topic. One group chose the topic of affirmative action. The group, made up of one African American female, one African American male, one white male, and one white female, introduced and explored different ways of thinking about affirmative action. The class had already prepared for the day by reading articles chosen by the group.

While the group prompted the class with questions, I began to notice an unsettling thing—the class became divided among race lines. The white students had much to say about the topic, but the African American students remained silent. This silence was obvious and overshadowed the whole presentation. At the time, the silence made me uneasy and I pointed out to the class that all the white students seemed to be giving their opinions. Was this the Southern cliché of white domination? How was it possible that there were no African American voices on the topic of affirmative action? Who was gaining from this discussion? I asked the class if any of the African American students wanted to comment on the issue. No one really wanted to comment.

Later that afternoon, I tried to figure out the cause. Was it a thoughtful pondering silence? Was it a folding of the arms and a refusal to engage? I imagined the students leaving the class and then talking about affirmative action with their friends in the cafeteria. Were they exchanging ideas only with people who shared their own beliefs? That day, I received an email from a student who said that she felt uncomfortable that I had called attention to the fact that none of the African American students were having a voice in the debate over affirmative action. She had a good point. Even though the discussion in the class became divided along racial lines, I felt extremely uncomfortable



pointing this out to the class and even more worried when I asked the students who had been silent to speak. I felt my whiteness in that instant while I stood at the head of the class and as I asked the African American students to participate, I instantly had the feeling that my request might be perceived as essentializing. In that moment, I had to make a choice. Although this was just one moment in a classroom, it was actually emotionally loaded for all of us. Not only was I afraid that my students would resent my probing into the subject, but I was concerned about my own vulnerability as a white instructor discussing a race-related issue. I was reminded of the interplay of emotions that are occurring in the classroom, and how they go far beyond the actual discussion that might be taking place.

I emailed the student back saying that I was sorry that my comments had caused her discomfort, but I thought that it was my responsibility to push the class for the sake of critical dialogue. I do feel like I have to be devil's advocate and find ways to have students talk about what they might not want to talk about. However, I was very upset about the email. I was concerned that I had done or said something wrong. (Looking back, I worry that this sounds like a dismissive answer to a complicated issue and a worthy, but reactive complaint.)

The next session I addressed the class and proposed that we have a discussion about our previous class. We conducted a meta-discussion about what had happened during our affirmative action class. And I thought going into it, this is really a problem. We have to have a whole class on why we couldn't talk about our last discussion.

I asked the class why we had had such a difficult time talking about affirmative action. The answers they gave were much more revealing than I thought they would be and not necessarily all that predictable. Many of the African American students said that they were tired of discussing race. One African American female student said that she really didn't believe in affirmative action, but she knew that some people would be angry at her for saying so. What a dichotomy. On the one hand, the subject was too emotionally explosive so no one wanted to say the wrong thing. On the other hand, the students are sick and tired of talking about the subject of racial discrimination. To me this sounds like a very dangerous problematic space – too emotional and yet too cliché all at the same time. Simultaneously, it's precisely the kind of space to dive in for real critical thinking, writing, and analysis.

Why were some of the students feeling like it was pointless to even have a conversation about this topic? How can fear and boredom go together? In our efforts to have frank discussions about race, have we become too focused on product over process? I think it is time to re-evaluate our own fear and that of our students, and take the risk that a subject that elicits personal and deep emotions, might not end up to be a direct route to a life-changing meeting of cultures and minds. In order for us to have the kinds of sharing of ideas and beliefs that we long for, we are going to need to admit that it could end up being painful, for us and the students. But in the reality that our students have become trapped between apathy and fear, we need to find ways to open up our discussion about race and risk discomfort, or else we will have fallen into a scary place where emotions are so intense that we turn away from even dealing with the subject and instead rely on

rehashing our discussions about race in safe, clichéd ways that fail to disrupt the power structures of the university that are already in place. I don't want my students to become, as hooks writes, "pawns of those who invent the games and determine the rules" ("Community" 35). We need to start by evaluating the fear that exists during any discussion about race – fear of students from different races, fear of teachers who might offend someone, fear of the administration who relies on politically correct definitions of what we should talk about in the composition classroom.

Of course, it is difficult to analyze the silence of students. Several composition theorists, such as Cheryl Glenn and Anne Ruggles Gere have explored the rhetoric of silence as a communication strategy for those who feel marginalized. Gere prompts her readers to become aware of instructors' tendencies to privilege speaking and discount the way students use silence, reminding us that "silence provides protection *from* as well as shelter *for* power" (208). She especially focuses on "personal writing," and the way certain writing environments can push students to expose themselves to the point of disempowerment, instead of the opposite. Other authors, such as Susan Sontag, write about the creative potential of silence, "an enriching emptiness" (367) she calls it. Indeed, silence can be another form of Berthoff's chaos, a place to pause and reflect, a moment of creative possibility. Certainly, silence can be an important way for students to assert their desire to resist the authority of the classroom. However, in the affirmative action discussion, I was more concerned that the silence was disempowering, a way for those who are the most comfortable and powerful to get themselves heard. I admit that I most likely privilege speech over silence in my composition classes, but in this case, I wanted

to know the reason behind the silence. The reasons were much more complicated and emotion-filled than I had imagined them to be.

Just recently, my students chose to present on “The Torso: Passages 18,” by poet Robert Duncan. This poem turns the blason (a poetic genre that describes a woman’s body through metaphor) around to have a male author honor and worship the body parts of another man. The class discussion was charged to say the least. A group of students continuously brought up their emotional reactions of “disgust” and had a difficult time seeing this poem as a love poem. Although all the students didn’t share their sentiments, it was apparent to me that their emotional reactions wielded a power and couldn’t be disregarded en route to any discussion of the poem. They reminded me that students’ emotional responses to a text or subject matter are often impossible to separate from their thinking. As the instructor, I tried to allow their emotional responses, while interrogating their belief system that perpetuated their negative attitudes towards the poem. I tried to allow their thoughts and emotions while encouraging them to question their beliefs.

In *Teaching Community*, hooks describes a semester when she taught a course on James Baldwin. Initially students were surprised to discover that he was gay, and reacted emotionally in a negative way to this realization. As hooks writes, “This classroom was charged with emotional feeling, with painful feelings. Had I ignored their presence and acted as though an objectivist standpoint would create order, the class would have been a deadening experience...” (136). Although hooks didn’t want to close down those who had different viewpoints towards homosexuals, she also didn’t want to allow hate speech in her classroom. Instead, she acknowledged the intense emotions in the classroom, and

discussed the difference between careful critique and opinions that could be “damaging” to another person. Therefore, even students who could have been completely emotionally shut down during discussions about Baldwin were given a chance to stretch their abilities to discuss topics that stirred up conflicting emotions.

There is a space between silencing and out-of-control emotional response. The only way to get there is to take the time to use emotional responses as a way to go deeper into the subject matter being discussed. These emotional places of discomfort can allow us opportunities for deeper learning. Boler defines a “pedagogy of discomfort” as a way to “engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others...[and] to recognize how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely not to see” (177). Thus, she encourages educators to re-think the way they view teaching moments that create tension. Instead of trying to move away from discomfort, we need to learn how to tolerate it, and perhaps examine it. The reasons behind our discomfort are often pivotal to what we are going to learn or what we need to learn. Boler describes emotion as acting in this way. In every emotion-laden discussion in a composition class, we are dealing with the language of emotion during this discussion, as well as the actual emotion that comes about because of the discussion. Although these two aren’t separate entities, they are two factors shaping our discussions. Even though it may seem as if we are having a typical discussion, there are many subtle factors at work shaping the pathway of the discussion and what we learn from it.

Although the common reaction to emotion in the classroom is to dismiss it, how we think about emotion and our reaction to it is crucial to our understanding of it. If we believe that language and how we use it is a means for social transformation, as Paulo Freire does, then how we name and contemplate emotion in the classroom becomes a task that we must take on. He writes, “To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it” (88). But instructors haven’t even attempted to do this when it comes to emotion. Our beliefs about emotion are so embedded in our culture that we have trouble beginning to see how they are constructed and how they affect the teaching of writing.

Of course, this task seems to fall upon teachers because we are the leaders of the class. And yet allowing emotional moments in the classroom is a scary proposition. And so I do not want to suggest the “solution” to allowing emotion in the classroom should completely become an individual endeavor. In fact, I think the subject goes way beyond the individual instructor. One of the tricky things about emotion is that we tend to push it into the personal realm. We take what might be a public experience and put all of its burden on the individual’s private experience. Often this individual is perceived to be a female because of the gender’s association with emotion. Just like in the graduate class I described, emotional responses are attributed mostly to the individual and are expected to be “managed.”

And so this private/public split that is associated with emotion and gender is the way we tend to view emotions in the classroom. The feminist rhetoric class that I’ve described is an example of this. Not only did the students who were not directly involved in the class altercation label the emotions that surfaced a “personal” problem, but the

students who were accused them of backbiting spent a lot of time and effort blaming the student who accused instead of reflecting on why the student may have said what she said. They desperately wanted to put their attentions towards the one student, instead of looking at the larger implications of her behavior. Although this was a feminist rhetoric class and we would assume that most of the class was devoted to examining hierarchal situations, our beliefs about emotions were so ingrained that the instinct to silence the “emotional” student was still there. At one point in my conversations with one of the participants, she implied that she really didn’t see why backbiting was such a problem. She explained that it happened in every class, so why was it such a big deal? This woman, who would probably describe herself as a staunch feminist, could not view the personal and the emotional as signs that our class was fraught with issues concerning the distribution of power.

The above examples might help begin an examination of the ways in which our thinking and language on emotion shape the trajectories of our classroom discussions. Since views on emotion are embedded in our culture, it is difficult to evaluate and change our thinking about them, to see how wedded we are to views that may be outdated or unproductive to learning.

It is certainly difficult to analyze the epistemological consequences of every class discussion. In fact, it is impossible to do so. However, no one can deny that our overlying beliefs and thinking about class discussions, especially when discussing topics such as race, sexuality, and gender, affect pedagogical choices. Although emotion is just beginning to factor into these conscious choices, it is now time that, Worsham writes,

“we are called on to center the weight of scholarly inquiry on emotion, to see that all education is sentimental, that all education is an education of sentiment” (“Way” 163).

If the field of composition is dedicated to changing the world through the re-evaluation of language use, we should be reminded that nothing changes unless it changes on an affective level. That is, while its helpful to deliberate about social issues and subject matter, these deliberations are entrenched in emotions that are powerful, embedded, and can act as signals for problems that are more social than personal, more public than private.



## CHAPTER V

### TEACHERS SPEAK ON EMOTION

“In order to name, imagine and materialize a better world, we need an account of how Western discourses of emotion shape our scholarly work, as well as pedagogical recognition of how emotions shape our classroom interactions.”

Megan Boler

In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer writes “if we want to grow as teachers – we must do something alien to academic culture: we must talk to each other about our inner lives – risky stuff in a profession that fears the personal and seeks safety in the technical, the distant, the abstract” (Palmer 12). Although I have argued that emotions are culturally constituted, there is no doubt that they are also experienced by the individuals. Put simply, emotions matter. Their power as a factor in the classroom is undeniable, despite instructors’ efforts to manage or hide them. One way to think about emotions in the classroom is to explore the way instructors view emotion in their own writing processes and classrooms and how what they know about emotion gets translated to their students. Again, Worsham cites formal education as one of the environments where a citizen learns how to have “an affective relation to the world” (232). With each textual choice, lesson plan, and response to students, instructors are teaching students how to

react to, manage, or understand their emotions as they connect to their writing processes and the texts that they read.

At the same time that students are being “schooled” in emotions, instructors are constantly trying to hide theirs. In a field that is propelled by passion, desire, the love of human qualities and communications in the world, it is ironic that teachers are expected to be always cool and professionally distant. Palmer suggests that we need to take risks through talking about our “inner lives” in this profession. Repeatedly, writing teachers ask their students to try, to risk, to fail, and to share what they would normally keep hidden. I believe instructors must do the same.

One of the reasons why these discussions are risky is because of the way we view emotions in the humanities. In her article, “Me and My Shadow,” Tompkins writes “The thing I want to say is that I have been hiding a part of myself for a long time” (173). Deborah Chappel describes herself as a “disembodied brain” (21). In “What’s Love Got to Do with It?” Susan Kirtley writes, “As a teacher I have often felt the need to relinquish my feelings in order to be a ‘real’ instructor...compelled to hide what I have been taught is a weakness: my emotions” (58). Our ideas, narratives, and identities as teachers of composition are often connected to emotion and our ideas about emotion. The idea that Kirtley touches upon, the notion that a professional instructor must restrain and contain emotion, is just one variable of the way teachers view emotion’s role in and outside of the classroom. It seems simplistic to pretend that this struggle, even if it is just in the mind of an instructor, doesn’t affect the course he/she is teaching.

This chapter focuses on emotion from the teacher's perspective through a study of what instructors think about emotion. Through TA interviews, I examine their beliefs about emotion and writing and how they view themselves in terms of their emotions in the classroom. Although ideally all instructors (both new and veteran) are always examining their teaching practices, TAs and beginning instructors are learning how to negotiate between their writing and teaching philosophies and the expectations of the academy. As new instructors are discovering how to enact their pedagogical ideals and pragmatic understandings of how to write, they are already becoming aware that reason trumps the value of emotion in the university. What Tompkins, Chappell, and Kirtley are struggling with is the expectation that teachers, especially writing teachers, can effectively teach academics without having their emotions playing a role. Furthermore, as stated previously, female instructors can be at a disadvantage when it comes to how we view emotion in the classroom. Although I do not want to essentialize women, their role as emotion bearers in American culture causes them to simultaneously cultivate being aware of emotion while also being taught to discount the academic relevancy of this skill.

We want to view education as "the practice of freedom," but "bourgeois educational structures seem(ed) to denigrate notions of wholeness and uphold the idea of a mind/body split" ("Transgress" 15-16). Teachers and students come to the classroom with expectations about how emotions function in an educational setting. However, new instructors and TAs are at a particular time when they are encouraged and trained to reflect upon their thinking about teaching and come to terms with how it coincides with needs or wishes of the university.

This in-between space that teaching assistants occupy provides an interesting population to study and observe. Although graduate students are certainly aware of dominant ideology in our culture and the university, they have a freedom in the fact that they are part student, part professor, and yet neither of these roles completely. Perhaps there maybe more instances of emotion that occur in a classroom where authoritative walls have yet to be built. The extra comfort that students feel with teaching assistants, as well as the perceived lack of authority of their instructors, might allow emotions that would be otherwise stifled. At the same time, new instructors are being indoctrinated into the expectations of the university. They are selecting reading materials for their own students and examining texts that focus on the teaching of composition. What they say and do at this stage reveals their perceptions, perceived expectations, and idealized teaching philosophies.

Another reason why I chose this population to study is because although emotion theory has recently surfaced as a topic to be discussed, our theories have not quite reached our practices. Although Micciche focuses on the lack of attention on affect in relation to ethics in her article, “Emotion, Ethics, and Rhetorical Action,” many of her observations can be applied to the basic notion of emotion in the classroom. Micciche discusses the implications of Gary Olson’s essay “Encountering the Other” by stating that he “underscores the gap between theory and practice in identity-based pedagogies, the gap between what we say we do and what we actually do” (163). Despite the current interest in emotion theory and composition, the practice of how we actually perceive emotion in the classroom has virtually remained the same. By interviewing teaching

assistants and beginning instructors, I want to reveal how our traditional notions of the emotion/reason split still exists and prevails in the classroom. Furthermore, Micciche mentions that it is particularly ironic that we have the “therefore overlooked, presence of emotion in the very discourse of composition studies – in the ways we talk about what we do and why we do it” (166). In this chapter, I offer some examples of how future professors are talking about the topic of emotion, and how composition is full of emotion-laden discourse, which is often ignored and overlooked.

Although I knew my interviewees previously (through the graduate program at UNCG), I had only discussed teaching with a few of them and the focus of our previous discussions did not center on emotion. UNCG’s English Department has a unique teaching assistant program. TAs are not merely assistants to professors, but design and teach their own classes. The program tries to foster a community of teachers and does so through a combination of guidance and autonomy. Graduate students begin their time as TAs with an intensive week-long training session. As their first-year continues, they attend a course that focuses on composition theory and their daily teaching challenges. In addition, instructors meet once a month for “Brown Bags” for further training. Topics explored in Brown Bags include: portfolio assessment, ESL students’ issues, etc. Although books are chosen for first-year TAs, by the time second semester comes, they are allowed to choose their books and design their courses. Primarily instructors teach composition, but by the time they are in their third year, they are assigned to teach introductory literature classes as well.

I interviewed six instructors from various specializations within the department – composition, literature, and creative writing. They all had experience teaching composition, but two had begun teaching composition through a degree in creative writing, two were earning Ph.D.s in Rhetoric and Composition, and two were earning their degrees in Literature. All initial interviews lasted about an hour. In addition, follow-up questions were sometimes asked of the participants. The subjects were chosen because of their willingness to participate and because of their specializations. However, before choosing my subjects, I was aware that all of them were instructors who took their teaching seriously and who were in the habit of reflecting on their teaching practices.

It's not often that we talk about our emotions as teachers and how we view this aspect of our classes. Part of the reason why we rarely do this is because other aspects of the class take precedence in our conversations – problems in the class, techniques, practices, successes, etc. Although “emotion in the act of teaching” seems a vague concept, there are three major categories that continuously appeared throughout my interviews. These are: 1) the understanding the writing teacher has had about emotion and the writing process; 2) the teacher's beliefs or understanding about how emotion operates in the way they shape or alter or assess their courses; and 3) their experiences with emotion in the classroom and their reflections on these events.

Many of those interviewed for this dissertation acknowledged some relationship between emotion and their own writing processes, although before being interviewed they were informed of the topic of my dissertation, so they knew emotion and writing

would be discussed. Instructors viewed emotion differently as individuals, but there were some similarities and differences across the discipline.

The informants at the time of their initial interviews (with their actual names changed):

Ben is a second-year graduate student specializing in Rhetoric and Composition.

Jeremy is a first-year graduate student specializing in Rhetoric and Composition.

Bill has an MFA in poetry and teaches as a beginning instructor, although he experienced the training program at UNCG. He has since graduated and continues to write poetry and teach as a lecturer.

Lillian has an MFA in poetry and teaches as a beginning instructor. She, too, was trained as a graduate student in the UNCG Composition Program. She writes and teaches as a lecturer. In addition, she was hired this year to assist the Director of the Writing Center.

Cynthia was a fourth-year graduate student at the time of the initial interview. She specializes in Native American Literature.

Dave was a first-year graduate student at the time of the initial interview. He had a dual specialization in both Composition and American Literature After 1900.

*“You can’t sit down to write something without having an emotion:” Emotion and the Writing Process*

From my own experience, the emotional struggles and triumphs in my writing life seem to parallel other aspects of my life. Just as who we are as people affects who we are

as teachers, our writing challenges and triumphs mirror those that we encounter in life. It is no accident that I chose to write a dissertation on emotion. As Annie Dillard writes:

People love pretty much the same things best. A writer looking for subjects inquires not after what he loves best, but after what he alone loves at all...Frank Conroy loves yo-yo tricks, Emily Dickinson her slant of light; Richard Selzer loves the glistening peritoneum, Faulkner the muddy bottom of a little girl's drawers visible when she's up a pear tree. (67)

In this case, she is referring to artists and the subjects that they pursue again and again. She tells us Thoreau said in the same vein, ““Pursue, keep up with, circle round and round your life....Know your own bone: gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw at it still”” (qtd. in Dillard 68). My particular subject is emotion, and in writing my dissertation, my greatest obstacle or catalyst to finishing has been due to a feeling like a failure or a success, feeling ready to graduate or being hesitant to move on. While writing, my motivation to sit in my chair and write or do something else has to do with the way I feel and think and how I respond to my emotions or thoughts. Therefore, even if a writing task isn't “personal” it is definitely connected to the writer.

I began each interview by asking how other instructors think about emotion in relation to themselves as writers, to discover how they pass on what they know to their students, and to talk about how they view emotion in the classroom.

One composition instructor, Ben, described his writing process as being fraught with perfectionism and anxiety about “getting it right.” He struggles to find his own words in the face of overwhelming amounts of research. Coming from a working-class background and one of the first in his family to graduate from college, he feels a



responsibility to this background. Prior to this interview, Ben was already interested in emotion in the composition class, although he was primarily interested in empathy in the classroom. His writing experiences are reflected in his teaching practices. He meets with students in one-on-one conferences often because he says, “You can teach technique but at a certain point it is not the reason why they are not getting work done.” Here, Ben is alluding to other aspects of a writing project besides mechanics or craft. One of these factors can be the struggle students have with emotion and their writing processes.

The teachers who had M.F.A. backgrounds seemed aware of emotion in their writing processes, but their comments reflected a struggle with how to combine their identities as writers with their identities as instructors given their perceived expectations of what is required of composition instructors. Lillian said, “emotion is part of the process and the product.” Of her own work she is very in control of the emotion within the writing itself. She said, “In the poetry I’m working on now...I don’t want it to be over the top, to be too precious.” Yet this poet fully acknowledges that her writing has to be borne of feeling or else it will be “too austere.” Therefore, in my observation, it seems as if one of the goals for this instructor would be how to get her students to access emotion, but be in control of it as a writer. Yet this goal was not necessarily articulated by and conscious to the instructor.

To further complicate her beliefs about emotion and writing, Lillian showed concern later in the interview about how students perceive an outpouring of emotion on the page. Although emotion is necessary for writing to be good, it is not the only factor of good writing. Lillian wants students to know that emotion without anything else does not

necessarily make a successful piece of writing. Another M.F.A and current instructor, Bill, admits, “You can’t sit down to write something without having an emotion,” but he is concerned that after a semester of poetry, writing craft, and discussion of technique, it all “goes out the window” when students pick their favorite poems at the end of the semester. It is ironic that instructors would find it surprising that students gravitate towards the texts that they feel an attachment to. In this case, the students are reminding instructors that craft and technique can only take us so far. Poetry has to have some emotional power to be valuable, memorable and meaningful. Students can learn how to analyze a poem for a semester, and this analysis is valuable to their learning, but their emotional investment is an important factor in what they learn and remember.

When I asked Bill about emotion and the writing process, he simultaneously scoffed at the idea of emotion and writing and also perceived emotion as an assumed aspect of writing poetry. Bill says that his work seems less directly attached to emotion and that when he thinks about writing and emotion it is in the context of a less sophisticated writer, a beginning writer. However, to me it sounds as if he is just becoming more adept at using his own emotions as fuel for his writing and more skillful in the caliber of how he expresses emotions to his reader. The more experienced writer calls upon emotion just like the beginning writer, but knows how to manage emotion in the writing process, how to alter the emotionality of the piece of writing, and how this is translated to an audience. And so, it is akin to revision or reflection and the double-entry journal and making the process visible for students. Emotion is obvious in the beginning writer, as Bill says, “[For beginning workshops] it’s hard for them to step back and

separate emotion from the poem,” but he admits “if you look at work with no emotional connection, it [the writing] seems dry.” However, experienced writers may wrestle with emotions, but know how to make them useful from what they’ve learned from their past writing projects. Here, Bill is pinpointing one of the problems with talking about emotion and writing. That is, the fear that instructors have that they will be encouraging their students to believe that emotion is the only factor in composing a writing project. In fact, several instructors have insisted to me that students think their writing is always validated if it is connected to their emotions, that they think emotions are evidence enough that their writing is of good quality. Like Bill though, these instructors believe that the only way to counter this tendency in students is to discount emotion entirely. The crux of the issue of emotion is here in Bill’s comments. Of course, emotion is part of his writing process, as a writer, but also in the way he crafts his work. The difference is that Bill seems to have a sense of emotion and his writing even though he may not be aware of how it functions, while beginning writers do not have this understanding.

In my conversation with Bill, it is evident that there is a type of status involved when a poet discusses his/her poetry in terms of emotion. Why does Bill equate talking about emotion with beginning writers? Why is it necessary for experienced writers (aka “real writers”) to deny or not speak of the emotional aspect of their writing processes?

Ben, who specializes in Rhetoric and Composition, stated his view of emotion from a pragmatic perspective. Like most of the instructors I interviewed, emotion is an essential element of the writing process to Ben. However, if instructors know this to be in conjunction with their own experience as writers, then to ignore the role of emotion in

teaching writing classes goes against experience. Ben commented on his writing process saying, “For me it has so much to do with insecurity and inadequacy. I have this obsession of having read everything about an argument [before writing a paper]. [I do] massive amounts of reading. It almost becomes a paralysis. The only time I get writing done is when I feel confident.” In this manner, emotion and belief are directly linked to his writing process. Whether he actually must feel confident to write or that is just his perception ceases to matter at some point. The perception that one must feel confident to write can end up being a hindrance for beginning and experienced writers. Repeatedly, writers admit to having anxiety and fear when sitting down to write and yet they get writing done anyway. But if students believe that they must feel confident before they begin, then they might be waiting a long time. Of course, Peter Elbow’s freewriting was introduced to combat such a belief and tendency to wait for a copasetic emotional state. Although many instructors incorporate the technique of freewriting in their classes, many students still believe that turbulent emotions, like anxiety, pain, and doubtfulness, are reasons to avoid their writing projects.

### *Emotion in the Classroom*

Although instructors are aware of their own writing processes, it is not always certain how this knowledge will translate into pedagogical practices. Ben seemed very confident in admitting that there is a connection between writing and emotion. When asked what he would say to critics who challenged his view of the importance of emotion in the writing classroom, he said, “I can believe it’s not my job [but] I can’t say it has no

place and try to teach writing...we [instructors] can give the illusion of objectivity but in practice and experience and in our every day walking around as teachers we know that's not true." He brought up a point that is often overlooked by those who view the subject of emotion in the classroom as unacademic or irrelevant or a waste of time. Our theory about teaching has to hold up to our practice of teaching. Since we are teaching writing, our practice of writing has to be enacted in our teaching. As writers with years of education who encounter our own emotional experiences with writing, we cannot deny that these exist when our students, who are inexperienced writers, work through the assignments we give them. In our own practice, we are fully aware that emotion is part of the writing process. To separate it as something inconsequential – to label the emotion in the writing classroom as "therapy" – is to deny our own experiences as writers. And yet, even though we are aware of emotion in our writing, perhaps we don't spend enough time articulating or theorizing this emotion.

Later in the interview, Ben's comments reminded me of what Bill said about beginning writers and emotion: how it may be unfair to inexperienced writers to deny that emotion plays a part in the writing process. Ben said, "[to deny the emotional aspects of writing] just privileges students who already know how to manage [them]." They need to cultivate an "ability to harness and control and to understand these emotional responses that they are having to the ways that they are feeling about it." He cites revision as a time when "we are asking our students to be uncomfortable." When they are asked to re-evaluate what they initially wrote down and realize that it wasn't perfect the first time,

they are going to feel something. As any writer can attest, the realization isn't always pleasant.

Ben acknowledged the revision process as one part of writing that can present an emotional challenge to students. According to Ben, instructors need to communicate the difficulty of finishing a writing task. We need to be "changing the finish line." Instructors should make students aware of the feelings involved in writing, especially "the feeling that when you turn something in it might not feel quite right [and] to help them realize that that's a normal feeling." Unlike other subjects where there is a sense of completion or finality, this sense is not always clear cut for writing. For a writing project, there is often no completion or an arbitrary completion. The feeling that goes along with this lack of closure is something that students are not trained to endure. The end of a writing project is arbitrary – rather, the end is a stopping place. It is a decision by the writer to stop at a certain time in the development of the piece whether it's because of publication, an assigned deadline, or a feeling/thought that he/she is done with the work for a time period (or forever). To make endings stand for something more is misrepresenting the writing process. Bill is aware that students long for closure and that this aspect of writing may cause discomfort. He said, "You can't respond to being uncomfortable without emotion." He challenges instructors to create a space in which students can actually learn how to tolerate discomfort in the writing process. As Ralph Keyes writes in *The Writer's Book of Hope*, "The hardest part of being a writer is not getting your commas in the right place but getting your head in the right place. Where help is really needed is in the area of countering anxiety, frustration, and despair" (5). Keyes's comments highlight the fact that

a major reason that writing is difficult is because of the emotions experienced by writers. So much attention, effort, and discussion among instructors focus on technical problems in student writing, but the emotions involved in the process are perceived as secondary. Students need to learn that the feeling of frustration might not end at the time that they hand the paper in. An uncomfortable feeling is likely to be a part of the writing process.

The term “anxiety” appeared in many of these interviews. Jeremy said, “Anxiety is at the heart of my writing process.” In fact, he admits that everything he does during his process is to get past his anxiety. He is constantly trying to get to that place where the anxiety has died down because he equates anxiety with “being stymied.” Like Ben, he takes copious notes to counteract his belief that he might never know a subject well enough. Perhaps this is his method to manage the “unknown” aspect of the writing process. At some point in a writing project, when his anxiety has diminished, Jeremy then realizes that he has passed a turning point. It’s interesting to me that Jeremy’s anxiety becomes a marker and a guide. As long as he is anxious, he feels as if he is not done with his notes and his freewriting. He admits that “There’s always a mess of thought that’s not on the page.” He likens this to an iceberg. I ask him if he is using this metaphor because Hemingway used it. He says that he never heard of it before or doesn’t remember hearing it before. Hemingway wrote:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing. (77)

I think it is interesting that Jeremy is searching for a way to articulate the writing process in the same way that Hemingway, a creative writer, did. Jeremy's statement demonstrates knowledge of how to communicate information to the reader effectively, but it also shows how he has found his own method to deal with his emotions and writing. Instead of investigating the emotions or knowing that they are part of the process, he grounds his system in as much reason, note-taking, and research that he can accomplish for any particular writing project.

Towards the middle of our interview, Jeremy says, "Emotion informs our identity in the sense that if we have an idea of who we are, the emotions we feel will either complement or contradict them." This idea can be applied to instructors' emotions during teaching and writing or their students' identities of themselves as writers and learners.

### *Writing and Negative Emotions*

Every teacher I interviewed mentioned that students come into the classroom feeling like terrible writers. They are afraid and lack confidence in their writing abilities. Their reaction to their fear is to label themselves as "terrible writers" and to say they hate English classes. There's no way around the fact that it is our job to do something about this. And thus we are in a catch-22 again. How do we encourage our students and instill them with confidence in their abilities while also critiquing their work? As Lillian puts it, "I want to feel like they can write and have that taken seriously, but it's not just an outpouring of emotion. [An outpouring of emotion] doesn't mean that it's good writing." Lillian thinks it is important to acknowledge that a writer must deal with emotions to



write, especially if that piece of writing touches upon important and/or emotional matters to the student. “This experience has got to be difficult. [I want to acknowledge that] writing it has been difficult.” Yet, Lillian is fully aware that the student’s piece of writing needs to be critiqued, regardless of the challenges the student faced to write it. She wants to emphasize that despite the student’s “true emotional experience,” she wants to talk about “pure emotion as useful to the writer” and then explain whether or not it is useful for the audience.

Cynthia describes a conference with a student in which she understood the rhetorical stance that the student was trying to make, but the student struggled with how to actually communicate it successfully. Cynthia said, “She completely burst into tears and felt incompetent as a writer.” Cynthia recalls that moment to reflect upon the emotionality of the composition classroom and how frustrated students can feel. She says, “Almost by definition writing instruction tells them what’s wrong with their papers.” I think that writing instructors are aware of the criticism aspect of teaching writing. However, it seems like we are still negotiating the space between acting as cheerleaders and acting as critics.

Interestingly, from the group of writing instructors I interviewed, only one brought up any positive emotion associated with the writing process. When talking about his own process and emotion, Dave admitted that he struggled with his tendency to over-rationalize and not tap into emotion when he writes. He believes that this is connected to being a graduate student and feeling pressure to perform in an academic way. He also mentioned that whatever feelings he has towards a professor or a project often manifests

themselves in the writing process. Overall, he feels a great deal of anxiety when it comes to working on a project or an assignment in graduate school, especially when it comes to writing in a high-stake situation. He gives the example of such a time when he had to write a paper for an especially demanding and critical professor and how the process from beginning to end was an anxiety-provoking task. However, Dave says that after he completed the paper he felt a great sense of pride. In all the discussions about anxiety and writing, I, and the other interviewees, had forgotten to highlight the extremely positive emotions that go along with the act of writing. Obviously, writing instructors must get some pleasure from the act of writing, or at least from a writing project completed. Dave says that he is aware of communicating these positive emotions through conferencing with his students. He conferences with them every other week and often asks, “How did you feel about this piece when you were done?” He explained to me that he also frequently discovers that students dislike the most intellectually challenging writing or reading tasks. I think that this occurrence for Dave and his students is related to the negative emotions that students associate with the struggle of intellectual inquiry. They are not taught to enjoy the “irritation of doubt” as C.S. Peirce calls it or the “ambiguity” or “chaos” as Berthoff states, although this experience might be the place where there is the most potential for learning and discovery. Berthoff quotes I.A. Richards by saying these moments are the “hinges of thought” (Peirce 13; qtd. in Berthoff “Making” 71). They are where inquiry launches forth and begins to develop.

One instructor insisted that her classes do not conjure up emotion, but she ended our interview session by admitting that she was afraid her classroom has the potential of

turning into a therapy session. This instructor voiced a concern that I hear quite frequently. Just the fact that we have this label for emotions in the writing classroom is a denouncement of these emotions. What I mean is that by labeling or dismissing the emotional part of the class as “therapy,” we have taken away an opportunity for us to investigate these aspects of the class. The metaphor “like therapy” is a dangerous one. It implies that the expression of any emotion in a composition class alters the definition of the class. The overuse of the phrase “like therapy” to describe a composition classroom reifies the false notion that classrooms are environments where emotional expression doesn’t appear. The label of therapy denies any nuances that may exist with emotion in the classroom and implies that all of our experiences, academic or otherwise, either fall into the category of emotion and therapy or anything outside of that realm. In addition, the categorization of “therapy” is not used in this context as a positive. The most prevalent implication is that emotion has trumped reason and that no “real” critical inquiry or academic work is happening. This term can be used by others to dismiss an entire academic field, such as woman’s studies. It is a marker, a fear tactic. Furthermore, one has to define what one means with the word “therapy.” If therapy equals discussing issues that matter to passionate humans and inquiring scholars, then there’s a characteristic of therapy that already exists in the classroom.

How do we determine whether or not the class has turned into a “therapy session” or whether or not we are doing the necessary work towards becoming better writers and scholars? The fact that emotional work gets pushed to the side and labeled demonstrates a problem. Women’s Studies classes know this label well. Boler cites an article in *U.S.*

*News and World Report* in which the journalist responded to a university program that would require courses in gender studies. He wrote, ““A few women’s studies programs seem to be serious academic programs interested in ideas, evidence, debate, and an open search for truth. But most aren’t. Most are part therapy group”” (qtd. in Boler 110).

Although this article was written in 1998, the idea that personal experience and emotion are aspects of women’s studies programs that de-legitimize them is still prevalent.

Composition is often put in the same category of these programs. As a field, it has been linked with the goals of feminism. Part of this is due to the fact that there is more acceptance of emotion in composition, then, let’s say, biology. Even so, when instances of emotional display appear, there is a chance that they will be de-legitimized just like in the aforementioned Women’s Studies program, that they will be labeled as “therapy.”

Metaphors describe our thinking and feeling about writing and the discipline itself. In *Doing Emotion*, Micciche explores the “stickiness” of metaphors, a phrase coined by Sara Ahmed. She refers to this stickiness as the way “objects –including people, narratives, and a whole host of other signs – amass affective associations that embody and stand for the object” (27). “Therapy” is one of those sticky metaphors that Micciche talks about. The last thing a teacher wants is to have his/her class categorized as therapy.

In recent years, the metaphors that have been associated with composition instructors have been of the nurturing kind. For example, they are often referred to as “female” or “mothers.” Ideally, using metaphor is language to make meaning. As Aristotle wrote, “the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor” (“Rhetoric”

1459a5). Metaphors are poetic. They allow the audience to understand. However, metaphors that begin to stand for the object itself and bring along emotional connotations sometimes lose their usefulness. Metaphors can be the essence of creative thinking. The danger occurs “when metaphors harden, replacing descriptive value with a perceived matter-of-fact rendering of how things are, they lose their power to reconstruct, to help us see anew” (Micciche 38).

### *Terministic Screens and Doctors’ Diagnoses*

One complication involved in “diagnosing” the emotional barometer of a classroom and interpreting the emotions of our students is that our interpretations may be wrong. (In fact, given that we are human, it’s likely that we misinterpret them often.) Burke’s theory of terministic screens reminds us that how we see something is also a way of not-seeing it. Where we put our attention is how we will decide which action to take. Therefore, what we believe and think about emotions in the classroom affects the way we approach this aspect of teaching.

Palmer makes this connection between how we view the classroom and the way we take action to improve it. He tells the story of a dean who has come from a faculty meeting where the faculty complained about the students and their performances. He compared these faculty members to doctors who say, “Don’t send us any more sick people – we don’t know what to do with them. Send us healthy patients so we can look like good doctors” (41). Although I do not believe we are doctors trying to “cure” our patients, I do appreciate his point that the diagnosis of our students affects the way we

teach them. Or rather, we are continuously making assumptions about what is happening with our students in the classroom. It is our job to do so. Of course, evaluation of “performance,” or what ends up on the page, is an aspect of this, but if we are thoughtful teachers we are also evaluating the learning situation and trying to improve it. One way that we read “the text of the classroom” is by the students’ emotions (or emotional expressions). How are they reacting to the text or assignment? Do they appear enthusiastic or engaged? Are they scowling at us?

Palmer discusses the student-from-hell, a familiar character in the lives of most teachers, who was in one of his visiting classes: a boy who slouched in his seat and seemed to scowl at Palmer throughout the whole class. Even though Palmer was an experienced teacher at the time, he began to focus on this one student who seemed to be miserable in the class. He left the class feeling “self-pity, fraudulence, and rage” (43). Later on, when Palmer discovered that the person who was assigned to drive him around was the same student, the young man asked him questions about staying in school and discussed the problems he was having with a father who didn’t support his desire to get a college education (44). Palmer realized that he had misinterpreted the reactions of this student and that the student was more “fearful” than full of “disdain” (44).

Palmer’s narrative demonstrates two powerful layers of emotion that exist in the classroom. The student was feeling fear, but showed disdain. The teacher reacted to this interpretation of disdain with his own feelings of resentfulness and inadequacy and his behavior shifted the energy of the class towards this one student. The teacher misdiagnosed the emotion of the student and there were consequences for the class.

I've brought up this example of Palmer because it is a common occurrence. What is unusual is that he is writing about it and allowing others to think about how this example mirrors their own classroom experiences. Often I find myself focusing on the students of the class who are not succeeding or who are resisting being in the class. Although this isn't necessarily wrong per se, I have to catch myself and remind myself to let them go at times and focus on the students who are engaged with the class. I have to do this not only to maintain a balance in the classroom, but for positive reinforcement that my teaching is worthwhile.

In one of my recent composition courses, we discussed the first chapter and additional scenes of *Patrimony*, the memoir by Philip Roth. The book is a chronicle of Roth's dying father and how father and son begin to switch caretaking roles. Roth's father has a brain tumor and we realize from the beginning of the book that he will die soon. Although this class is reading excerpts from memoirs, I've included the scene in which Philip Roth's father is so sick that he loses control of his bowels and his son must clean up the mess. This scene is interesting to discuss on many levels, but especially because in the scene Roth promises not to tell anyone about the incident and then writes about it in his memoir. Since the class is focused on memoir, this scene fosters a discussion of ethical issues and rhetorical choices for memoir writers. Roth disobeys his father by telling us about its occurrence, but then informs us that he is breaking his promise to his father by including the vow never to tell.

In class, two male students were in charge of the initial class discussion, but I added comments and questions to keep the class going. When their presentation began,

most of the class said the book was “depressing” because it evokes a painful, but helpless feeling from the reader. As the class progressed, I began to panic. Everyone was quiet and uncomfortable. I was uncomfortable, too. We were discussing painful topics, the death of a parent, dealing with someone who is dying, watching one’s father in a weak moment, mortality in general – all of these together are normally pushed aside, especially in a culture that likes to deny the reality that death is inevitable.

As I sat there, I wished I had never assigned *Patrimony*. My instinct was to acknowledge the way I was feeling and to see if the class felt the same way. We talked about the difficulty of discussing such topics. I asked if it made them uncomfortable – if the book was difficult to read and if they just wanted to put it down. One student said she wanted to watch cartoons after reading it, to forget about the subject matter. This student is in nursing school and comfortable with medical information, but not the hopelessness of Roth’s father’s diagnosis. Other students shared their discomfort and we continued to talk about Roth’s writing voice, tone, and his motives for writing and if they thought the book was worth reading. The discussion continued. My anxiety ebbed. By acknowledging what was happening with our emotions we were able to get deeper into our thoughts about the text. I’m sure there were many emotions not revealed, but we uncovered the momentary emotions enough to allow us to think further.

When has the line crossed from leaning about the human condition to worrying that an environment with any emotion will compromise learning? As John Dewey writes:

What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his



own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply all he has learned and, above all, loses his ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur? (49)

At the very least, emotion is a major aspect of the experiences that students will have in the future. At the most, it is intertwined with thought in such a way that it is almost impossible to distinguish a thought without some type of emotion.

How does looking at the emotions of a class threaten the overall intellectual benefit of them? There is an idea out there that we are emotional balloons blown to capacity and any little pinprick will cause an irrevocable spill over into the class. Perceiving emotion as separate from thinking in the university reinforces the idea that emotion should be pushed to the margins of learning.

When asked if she was aware of emotion in the classroom, Lillian said, “I’m aware because it makes me nervous. I don’t deal well with confrontation. [There’s] all this potential to what I’d normally react to as a problem.” She describes herself as someone who avoids conflict, but she realizes that emotion in the classroom, tension and emotional reactions to writing and texts are moments when there are possibilities for deeper learning. As a poetry writer, she has learned how to manage the emotional challenges of writing, but to pass what she knows onto her students is much more complicated and daunting, especially when incorporating this knowledge into class discussions.

During one interview, Lillian recalled a day in class when emotions intersected with the lesson plan for the day. This particular class was focusing on civic discourse.

The instructor described every student as “exceptional.” That is, she had high expectations for the caliber of class discussion. In the course, they read significant texts and talked about major ideas. At the time of this memorable day in class, the discussion was based on Darwin, and the class was talking about evolution. As they touched upon the merits of Darwin’s arguments, the instructor noticed that a whole section of female students weren’t participating. When the instructor pointed this silence out, the students still refused to contribute. The teacher was shocked since this class was usually eager to discuss the assigned readings and normally these students were a pivotal part of class discussions. Before the class ended, one student said, “I am a biology major. You’d think I’d be down with Darwin.” Yet she wasn’t “down with Darwin.” Her religious beliefs conflicted with her field and the academic stance that she knew was expected of her. The instructor continued:

Another female student said, ‘This is against everything I believe.’ It just stopped everyone. [It was a] terrible place to end. When we came back to it, I felt so unequipped to handle it. I was approaching them as really great students. I wasn’t remembering the fact that they are people and that they have emotional attachments to their beliefs.

I’m sure that Lillian still thought of her students as “great,” but her language implies something about how we are evaluating our class and the students in it. In fact, this phrasing recalls Freire’s critique of the banking method of education, of being against the idea that students need to quietly absorb the information fed into them. It implies that students will control their comments in a way that fits into an expected way of taking

about topics in the college classroom. Lillian's experience in the classroom demonstrates the emotions that accompany valuable work that is going on in composition. Instructors are asking students to discuss and think about ideas that will possibly shake their ingrained belief systems. This is, in fact, a goal of education in general. However, this can be an uncomfortable space for students. After years of challenging our beliefs and deconstructing dominant ideology, instructors can forget the emotional impact that this kind of work can have on a student, especially one that has just left his/her home and the ideas within it. And yet, there is also a danger in having students absorb the new ideas that they learn in composition and then just regurgitate them for the instructor.

In the case of Lillian's students, it seems much more beneficial to have an honest discussion about where the students' beliefs contradict the idea of evolution, instead of just burying this conflict. Lillian added:

We talked a bit more about it. They were censoring themselves because they felt that their emotions were not going to be recognized or be a valid means of discussion, which is such a change from the purely emotional argument. [It was a] useful thing for the rest of the semester. After that happened, students were more able to say, 'I think this.' It freed something up because they had an articulation of belief. It wasn't something that we were emotionally approaching. We were only approaching from an academic standpoint. We were thinking about audience, etc.

One interesting part of this instructor's story was what was going on with the student in terms of balancing her own beliefs with the expectations and perceived expectations of the academic environment. As this instructor put it, "They know full well that people in power are going to dismiss" their beliefs that conflict with mainstream theories.

*The Rhetoric of Fear, Anxiety, and Control*

Within these interviews, there are repeated references to writing as it relates to fear and anxiety, and how emotion is something that needs to be controlled. It is ironic that the subjects of fear and anxiety arise with instructors who have chosen to teach writing as parts of their professions. If writing instructors continuously talk about writing and fear, it is not surprising that students connect writing to these emotions. Of course, it is not unusual for emotions to be connected to a “rhetoric of control” (Lutz 70). In her research, Catherine Lutz found that “talk about the control or management of emotion is also a narrative about the double-sided nature—both weak and dangerous – of dominated groups” (70). Even in every day discussion, the language that surrounds emotion is often related to the management or controlling of them. In her interviews, Lutz discovered that the “problem of controlling one’s feelings” arose for both men and women, but she found this discourse more often in women’s discourse (70). She states, “although both men and women draw on a culturally available model of emotion as something in need of control, they can be seen as often making some different kinds of sense and claims from it” (71). Similarly, the instructors I interviewed had slightly different reactions to the narrative of control. In fact, the men in the study all commented on the emotion of fear or the anxiety involved in writing, but in terms of their own writing or the writing process of their students. However, the two females in the study both shared anxiety about the emotionality of the classroom and alluded to the fear of what would happen if the class became out-of-control. Cynthia said that she was afraid of her class turning into a therapy session, and Lillian said that she was nervous about having to manage the emotions that

classroom discussions evoke. Granted, just because male instructors didn't talk about their fears of the emotions in the classroom doesn't mean that they don't feel these fears. It is highly possible that men are less likely to articulate the kind of emotions that may be perceived as less-than-manly.

The metaphor of control that arose for male instructor Ben was the metaphor of controlling a horse. In the interviews he said that students needed to "harness" their emotions towards their writing, as if emotion was a horse that could be led with a bit and some reins. In addition, Ben referred to the completion of a writing project as the "finish line." One of the problems with this rhetoric is that writing and the emotions that come with it are perceived as things to be conquered. Even though Ben is trying to acknowledge that there is often a lack of closure at the finish of a writing project, he is still using language that implies that there is a race, as if someone can actually win at the end of it.

*"I need not reveal personal secrets to feel naked"*

In order to teach well, to push students to challenge themselves and share their ideas, teachers need to reveal who we are. The type of learning and critical thinking that we want in composition calls for a certain amount of intimacy between teacher and student. Because of this, most good teachers are emotionally invested in their classrooms. As Palmer puts it, "We lose heart, in part, because teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability. I need not reveal personal secrets to feel naked in front of a class. I need only parse a sentence or work a proof on the board while my students doze off or pass

notes” (17). It’s not as if teachers are teaching from a distant emotional space that only concerns the student. Instructors have their own emotions in and outside of the classrooms about the teaching process.

Recently, I did what I have vowed never again to do again. I read a few of my evaluations on [ratemyprofessor.com](http://ratemyprofessor.com). Although many of my evaluations were positive, the ones I remember and the ones that haunt me are the negative ones. One student wrote that I am “a typical, hippie-dippy politically correct teacher.” She or he warns, “You’d better keep your mouth shut until the end of the semester.” I was crushed. Although I am open with my opinions, I pride myself on allowing many different perspectives to be heard. However, I am chronically imperfect. Maybe I was too forceful about my opinion during a class session. The merits of this student’s comment aside, I want to point out the emotional bind that good teachers are in. On the one hand, we are supposed to challenge the thinking of our students and have them re-evaluate their thoughts about their current beliefs. On the other hand, this task is going to upset some students and make them angry for a good reason. We are challenging a system that we are a part of, a system that we need in order to make a living and to continue what we are teaching. Furthermore, we are not encouraged to acknowledge our hopes for our classes and our heartbreaks when they do not go as planned. Instead, we are encouraged to discuss lesson plans and assignments, pretending that we can keep a cool distance about what happens in our classrooms.

Last semester, I was teaching an introduction to literature course and discussing weekly literary analyses/reflections with my class. On this particular day, I was giving

back their weekly assignment and going over my expectations. The responses were not well written and we needed to go over the rhetorical reasons why. I didn't hide the fact that I was unhappy about the way the assignment had been completed. However, at that point in the semester, students felt relatively comfortable voicing their opinions with me. One student said, "You care too much about our writing. You are too emotional about it." He said that he could tell whether or not they had done the assignment well by my mood when I entered the class. If I was happy when I was giving back their papers, then they knew that they had done a good job (as a class). These comments made me think about our students' expectations of their teacher's emotions. Were they expecting indifference? Were they implying that I would be a better teacher if I cared less about their work?

Teachers are often confronted with opposing ideas about the way they should think and feel about their roles in the classroom. On the one hand, we are instructed to be "professional" to keep our "emotions in check." On the other hand, the concept of "teacher" is unbelievably loaded with emotional expectations. In "The Cost of Caring," Eileen E. Schell reminds us of the danger of caring too much as composition teachers and how this re-inscribes the "feminine" motherly ideal of giving, sacrificing, and being "sucked dry" for the needs of our students of giving way too much and ignoring the needs of oneself (76). Schell critiques the way many of the leaders in the field of composition, such as Sondra Perl, Ann Berthoff, and Mina Shaughnessy, were labeled, in Elizabeth Flynn's words, the "foremothers of composition" (Schell 76, Flynn 244). As Flynn suggests, "the figure of the authoritative father" has been replaced by "an image of a nurturing mother" (244). Although these images are positive in that they show a field

shaped by women, according to Schell this concept of composition instructors has real financial consequences. In many ways, instructors who show caring are not taken seriously. Schell claims there is an expectation that women demonstrate emotional investment in their classes, but are not compensated financially for this expectation. Along with the metaphor of “mother” comes all of the baggage along with it. Certainly mothers are revered in American culture, but they are also inundated with expectations and responsibilities and are often taken advantage of. There is a danger if compositionists are perceived as “mothers” in that they will be loaded down with both emotional and institutional expectations and may not be given the same respect and financial compensation for them.

### *Emotions and Teacher Identity*

In the *Instructor's Manual to Hodge's Harbrace Handbook*, Eve Wiederhold and Wendy Sharer include a section on “The Emotions of Teaching.” It is the first time that I’ve seen this topic addressed in an instructor’s manual, and it comes in the form of a question and answer session with Sharer and Wiederhold. In this chapter, the complexities of emotion in the classroom are discussed. Throughout, the authors contemplate the teacher narratives that exist and come to the conclusion that they are incomplete. Their exploration of the issue falls under two main categories. These are: “What emotional expressions are acceptable in the professional field of composition?” and “What emotions are appropriate in terms of what goes on in the classroom?” (72). The authors provide an example of emotional expression of a teacher crying in the



classroom. Although the teacher felt embarrassed by the event, students responded favorably in terms of their kindness and evaluations. Notions of emotions are deeply embedded in our culture, especially in terms of students' expectations and reactions. And yet, one can see the bind that instructors are in and how it is difficult to negotiate the emotional lines in a classroom. One wonders how this moment affected students' ideas regarding their professor's authority or expertise. It is difficult to unravel and deconstruct. What is easily discerned though, is the necessity of understanding that emotion as a factor in the classroom and in the performance of teacher and student, and that there are many different levels of emotion functioning at the same time within a class. Overall, it is the job of researchers and instructors to study how emotion is operating in their courses and how it affects the classroom, their teaching, and their students.

Even in this study of six instructors, the complications involved with talking about emotion have been revealed in different ways. Obviously, gender continues to shape the way men and women talk about and perceive emotion. Furthermore, instructors seemed to be more or less comfortable talking about emotion in relation to their specializations. Although there needs to be much more work in the field of Composition and Emotion Studies, it is clear that the instructors who specialized in Rhetoric and Composition felt more comfortable articulating the connection between writing and emotion. Institutional pressures to cultivate a persona that centers on reason were throughout all the specializations; however, instructors who taught composition and came

from literature or creative writing backgrounds seemed more hesitant to claim emotion as a major part of writing and the writing classroom.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

This project has explored several ideas concerning emotions and composition: the rhetoric of emotion, emotion from the view of teachers, emotion in the classroom, and the way emotion is associated or named in creative writing versus composition. The next question is: How can this discussion of emotion affect the composition classroom?

As I have discussed in earlier chapters, emotion is already a factor in classes, but it is difficult to identify the ways in which it functions. I don't want to misconstrue the point of this project by offering a linear one-to-one solution for the way emotion has been relegated to a different realm than reason. Because there are difficulties with articulating emotion's function, this is not going to be an easy task. My primary goal for researching this topic is to continue the dialogue about an often ignored part of composition. So I want to be clear that even a questioning – an inquiry – into this topic, an “irritation of doubt” and the discussions that follow is a successful enough aim for now. However, I do want to point out the ways in which this project on emotion can affect the classroom today and in the future.

This year, as I've gone on a job search, every interviewer wanted to know exactly how my project would make a difference in the classroom. I know that it is a legitimate question, although I'm still working on articulating how the way we think about emotion will affect the classroom and the learning that happens within it. The topic itself is a

broad one. Yet, one of the most interesting aspects of this subject was how others in the field of English responded to it. The responses among those in the English profession ranged from irritation that I would consider emotion a legitimate area of scholarly study to mild interest to excitement over something that teachers experienced in their daily teaching practices, but hadn't quite articulated or hadn't talked about enough.

Obviously, the most important step is to change the way instructors react to and perceive both emotional expression and the emotion that underlies many of the events that happen in a classroom and to become aware of how we are "schooled" in emotion and the way we categorize emotion and talk about it may only benefit the status quo. As a writing class, as a class that examines language, there has to be some universal aim to composition that goes along the lines of, "language use matters and students can change their views and develop as learners." If instructors can agree with these basic principles, then along with them comes the idea that the "feeling rules" we have, the codes of conduct that educators assume as appropriate ones for the classroom, need to be re-evaluated. This doesn't mean that I am advocating going to the opposite side of the spectrum of emotional expression; however, it does mean that instructors need to become more comfortable with the concept that emotion and thought work together and that emotional expression in the classroom may not necessarily be a failure, but indicative of a potential learning moment.

How can a new theory of emotion and a new rhetoric of emotion change the classroom? First of all, it will cause instructors to realize that emotion in the classroom is attached to who gets to speak and who gets listened to. Perhaps there will be more careful

considerations of the political ramifications of emotional expression. Instead of just automatically dismissing emotional expression, instructors might think about whether or not minority status and adherence to “feeling rules” may be actually hindering genuine productive classroom conversations. In this way, instructors will think about the consequences of introducing emotionally difficult topics and realize that there might be actual emoting that goes along with these discussions.

Second of all, instructors and scholars may begin to deconstruct the emotions attached to the language that they use, thus making them more aware as rhetoricians, especially when it comes to talking about the field of composition itself. In a field that calls for the examination of culture and cultural identities, often emotion is intertwined with identity. In many ways, assignments that tap into cultural identities can often be emotional ones. One instructor I interviewed uses a form of Leslie Antonette’s “Multicultural Response Paradigm,” a set of questions to be used for students’ reactions to a text that connect the emotional to the analytical. The paradigm begins with the most visceral and subjective response to the text and ends with how these responses connect to the culture. It starts with questions such as:

1. Describe your strongest response to the text. This paragraph should describe the response not explain it.
2. At what point in the text did you feel this response most? (Antonette)

The paradigm then turns students’ attentions to the subject matter and textual structure of the story, piece of writing, or film. Students analyze what the text is about and how it is

expressed. Throughout this process, students reflect on why they are having such strong responses or weak responses to the text, so there is a constant interplay of text and emotional response. If students respond that they only feel boredom, the paradigm suggests that boredom may be a type of resistance to the text or the subject matter. Students are encouraged to look beyond and beneath this boredom to try to figure out if boredom is an umbrella for more varied emotional responses to the text. Although the “Multicultural Response Paradigm” is not the only method of teaching the connections between emotion and analytic thinking, it is a visible and easy way of incorporating the connection into the classroom.

Dave, one of the instructors interviewed, incorporates a similar paradigm in his classes. He uses the scene from the film *Borat* where the main character pledges allegiance to America while substituting violent images and words to Americans and the war. After showing his students this film, Dave asks them to respond emotionally to what they’ve seen and then asks him to explain their perspectives. Afterwards, he connects their emotional reactions to their thoughts about what it means to be an American and so he shows students how their academic inquiries have a connection to their emotional responses and vice versa.

Perhaps students and instructors will think about what creative writers already know about composing and emotion and how it can be useful to beginning writers. For creative writers, it is often understood that there is an emotional component to writing, even though it may be spoken about through metaphor. Instead of thinking about different genres of writing as being on opposite ends of the spectrum, perhaps writing

instructors can show different methods and ways of writing. Perhaps what creative writers say about being emotionally close to their material can be used in composition class, so that instructors can teach students that even though they may be writing on the political campaign of their townspeople that they have to find some emotional connection to what they are writing about.

Instructors can learn about how their own emotions are an important and valid and existing aspect of their teaching. It is unrealistic for teachers to pretend that emotions do not exist for them in the classroom. Given that a teacher probably has entered the profession because of a love for English studies, it is absurd to act as if he/she doesn't care about what happens in his/her classroom on an emotional level. As one interviewee put it, "Students confuse fairness with [lack of interest]." Perhaps it is time for students and instructors to re-think this notion that the best academic advancement comes from cold and distant analysis. I believe our culture does want teachers who care deeply about their students and the profession, but this kind of caring also comes with a human, emotional component.

Another way interest in emotion can further English Studies is through the critical lens of listening. As Krista Radcliffe explores in *Rhetorical Listening*, listening has been the overlooked part of the Aristotle's rhetorical triangle. Her text calls upon instructors and all rhetors to realize that listening is an essential component for ethical communication. However, emotion and listening intersect in ways that have the possibility to hinder or enhance communication.

First of all, listening and emotion share the characteristic of often being invisible, and thus, deemed as less important by our culture. As Radcliffe suggests, “U.S. culture privileges sight, what Martin Jay calls ‘ocularcentrism’” (22). This is certainly true for what happens in the classroom. Although assessment and seeing results are certainly important aspects of any learning environment, there are many factors going on during the learning process that cannot be seen and cannot be measured by normal standards. When assessing individual student participation at the end of the semester, I know that I am guilty of valuing speaking over other ways of interacting with the class, including careful and engaged listening.

Second, getting an audience to listen can intersect with emotion. Campbell gives the example of Audre Lorde at an academic conference in which a white female refused to listen to Lorde until she framed her question without anger in her voice. “The woman said, ‘Tell me how you feel but don’t say it too harshly or I cannot hear you’” (51). Emotion, therefore, can be a reason why audiences turn away from a speaker. It is important for scholars to deconstruct what is actually taking place during these rhetorical interchanges.

And third, the greatest obstacle to listening (according to Radcliffe) is an emotion: fear. Fear that teacher and instructor are forging into the unknown; fear that if students truly listened to each other emotions, would be provoked in such a way that instructors would not know how to handle them; and fear of both students and instructors of being vulnerable.



*There Are No Endings for Writing, Just Arbitrary Stopping Places*

As one of my interviewees suggested, writing is never finished, rather finished for the moment. Research regarding emotion and composition has just begun. Certainly this project is a beginning, not an end. There is much more work to do. However, if anyone was in doubt of emotion being part of the writing process, I will leave you with this example:

One of the most emotion-laden experiences in a scholar and writer's life is the writing of a dissertation. Not just because of the actual writing elements involved, but because of the stakes. As my defense date loomed, I found myself resisting writing. However, when I met with my dissertation director, I was reinvigorated with hope. Perhaps I would actually graduate and the project would be acceptable. This lightness and excitement carried over to my writing sessions. Each writing session became less an opportunity for failure, but more an opportunity to deepen what I had written. I wondered, how could words from an instructor actually affect my writing practice? And yet, an instructor can make all the difference.

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